

2013  
**YOUNG GAMECHANGERS**  
Final Proposals  
Americus and Sumter County





April 26, 2013

Dear Americus and Sumter County,

Last year, GeorgiaForward and some of its supporters thought that there must be a way to get younger, talented Georgians to help solve some of our state's pressing challenges. From those discussions, GeorgiaForward's Young Gamechangers program was born.

This year, the program's first, 25 innovative Georgians, all under the age of 40, were convened, as part of a bigger conversation on the future of rural Georgia, to get to know Americus and Sumter County and propose ideas that might help Americus and Sumter County overcome persistent challenges to their 21<sup>st</sup> century success. Specifically, after consultation with local leaders, three questions stood out as needing attention from the first class of Young Gamechangers. These questions were:

1. What economic opportunities is Americus/Sumter County missing out on?
2. How can Americus/Sumter County attract the young, entrepreneurial and/or retirees?
3. What is Americus/Sumter County's unique story to the world? How is it different than other rural communities?

This report includes the proposals offered by the 2013 Young Gamechangers. For six months, starting in November 2012, they worked hard on these ideas. They spent time learning about the history of the community, exploring some of its assets, hearing from local leaders and understanding the work that has been done to date. GeorgiaForward asked them to think "big" and to propose ideas that might not have been thought of before or that might not find immediate support. We hope that the ideas included in this report spark a conversation about the possibilities present in Americus and Sumter County. And, of course, we hope that some of these ideas find passionate local support and come to life.

This has been an exciting process and we are excited about the proposals. We hope that the process and the results are useful for Americus and many other rural cities.

This program would not have been possible without the openness and assistance of many people in Americus and Sumter County. Indeed, Americus and Sumter County are a special place and we are grateful to have been welcomed into it to learn and offer new ideas. Moreover, this program would not have happened at all without the generous financial support of the Mattie H. Marshall Foundation and the Georgia Municipal Association. For them, we are grateful.

It is our hope that we ignite a spark of innovation with these presentations. It has been a pleasure working with your community and we hope to do so in the future.

Sincerely,

Amir Farokhi  
Executive Director  
GeorgiaForward

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## Group 1

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*What economic opportunities  
is Americus/Sumter County  
missing out on?*

# Group 1 Contents

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## Americus and Sumter County

Americus and Sumter County were founded in 1832 and 1831, respectively. Sumter County lies in a stretch of some of the richest soil in the South, perfect for growing cotton. Americus saw a population boom in the 1850's as a result of the arrival of the South Western Railroad in 1854. Due to the high shipping costs along rail to Savannah, local citizens led by Samuel H. Hawkins built the country's only privately funded rail line, which travelled in an east west direction directly to Savannah. This created a crossroads of north/south and east/west railroads in Americus. As a result, Americus became a major distribution center for cotton and was known as the "Metropolis of Southwest Georgia." At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was the eighth largest city in Georgia.

Although Sumter County has primarily been an agricultural community, it has had its fair share of industry. In the 1930's, the Manhattan Shirt Company opened in Americus. The company employed over 1000 area residents, most of which were women. Around the same time, the local Chamber of Commerce made a concerted effort to recruit industry to move to Americus. Up to that point, the only major industry in Sumter County had been the Manhattan Shirt Company and the railroad companies. In 1957, Americus became the home of The Marlette Coach Company, which helped to make Sumter County a hub for mobile home manufacturers. The mobile home industry was a huge boon for Americus and Sumter County, with as many as 5000 people employed in the industry from Sumter and surrounding counties.

The 1970's saw a dramatic change in the economic environment of Americus and Sumter County. States surrounding Georgia relaxed regulations on the size of trailers allowed on their roads. As Georgia lagged behind on changing these regulations, the mobile home industry pulled out of Georgia. While many new manufacturers have since located in Sumter County, there has never been a return to the level of industry that the area enjoyed in the 1950's and 1960's.

Since 1976, Americus has been home to Habitat for Humanity International. Habitat has grown into one of the largest non-profit organizations in the world. In the same year that Habitat was founded, Jimmy Carter, a resident of Plains, Georgia, was elected the 39<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. Thanks in large part to these two events, tourism has had become an integral piece of Sumter County's economy.

Sumter County is home to Georgia Southwestern State University ("GSW") and South Georgia Technical College ("SGTC"). GSW is located in Americus, and has approximately 2,800 undergraduate students. GSW also offers graduate programs in English, Business Administration, Nursing, Computer Science, and Education. GSW is estimated to have a local economic impact of approximately \$73 million.<sup>1</sup> SGTC is located just outside of Americus in Sumter County. SGTC offers approximately 90 different short term

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<sup>1</sup> <http://gsw.edu/News/Articles/FY2011economicImpact>

technical certificate of credit, diploma and associate degrees, and has approximately 3200 students. SGTC has an economic impact of approximately 210 million on Sumter and the Surrounding counties.<sup>2</sup>

## Workforce Today

Today, Sumter County has an economy built on a mix of industry, tourism, healthcare, education, and a variety of smaller businesses. The mobile home industry has left the community, and the Manhattan Shirt Company closed in 1996. While Sumter County doesn't have as many large manufacturers as it enjoyed in the 1950's and 1960's, there are still a number of manufacturers in the city and county that employ a sizable skilled workforce. Agriculture is a big part of the community, and cotton, peanuts, wheat and corn are the county's major crops.

As with many rural communities, a significant portion of the population works in the public sector. The local school system is the county's largest employer and both Georgia Southwestern and South Georgia Technical College also are major employers within the community. Government employees work for the city, county, and the Sumter County Correctional Institute.

Healthcare is also a major part of the local economy. The local hospital was destroyed in 2007 by a tornado. Afterwards, the hospital authority partnered with the Phoebe Putney Health System to create Phoebe Sumter Medical Center. This result was a new, state-of-the-art hospital, employing approximately 400 people. In addition, Magnolia Manor, a retirement community which opened in 1963, employs over 350 people in Americus.

Finally, Sumter County is the home to two nationally recognized historic sites: the Andersonville Civil War Prison and the home of President Jimmy Carter. There are several other local tourism attractions in addition to the two national historic sites. In 2011, Sumter County enjoyed over \$37 million in direct spending from tourists. Tourism supports nearly 400 jobs in the community.



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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.southgatech.edu/index.cfm?PageID=207&NewsID=1872>

## STATEMENT OF PROBLEM/CHALLENGE

What economic opportunities is Americus/Sumter County missing out on?

Americus and Sumter County have a struggling economy with a 14% unemployment rate and a 28% poverty rate. Like many rural towns, Americus has lost manufacturing jobs during the past two decades and has not experienced a growth in other sectors of the economy to make up for these losses.

Fortunately, Americus has significant assets that could provide a foundation for economic growth:

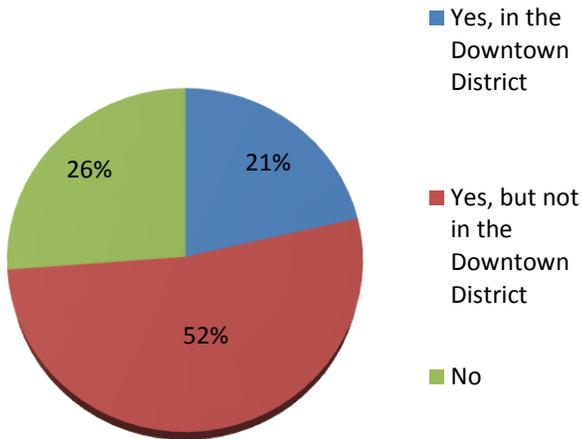
- The national headquarters of a world renowned, non-profit organization (Habitat for Humanity);
- Two institutions of higher education (Georgia Southwestern State University and South Georgia Technical College);
- A rich history with museums, historical sites, and monuments -- including two National Historic Sites in Sumter County;
- A new regional hospital; and
- A Motorsports Complex that is currently under construction.

The population of Americus has remained the same for the past several decades and the economy has declined with the loss of manufacturing. To understand how existing business owners think about potentially missed economic opportunities, we created a survey for local employers and employees to understand their perspective about the current challenges and opportunities for economic development. The survey was distributed through the list serve of the local Chamber of Commerce. Forty-two individuals responded to the survey.

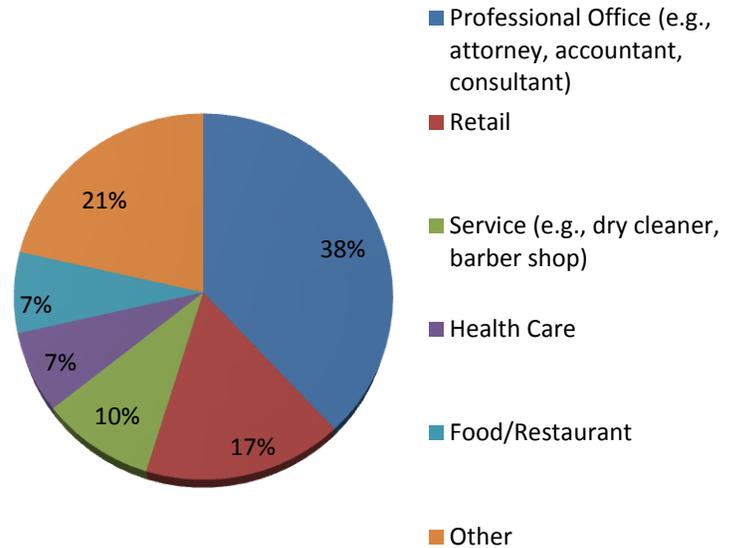
### Survey Results

Respondents included individuals employed in large and small businesses that represented a variety of sectors of the local economy including: professional offices, retail businesses, service industry, food/restaurants, and health care. Additionally, nearly three-fourths of respondents are employed in businesses that are located within the city limits of Americus.

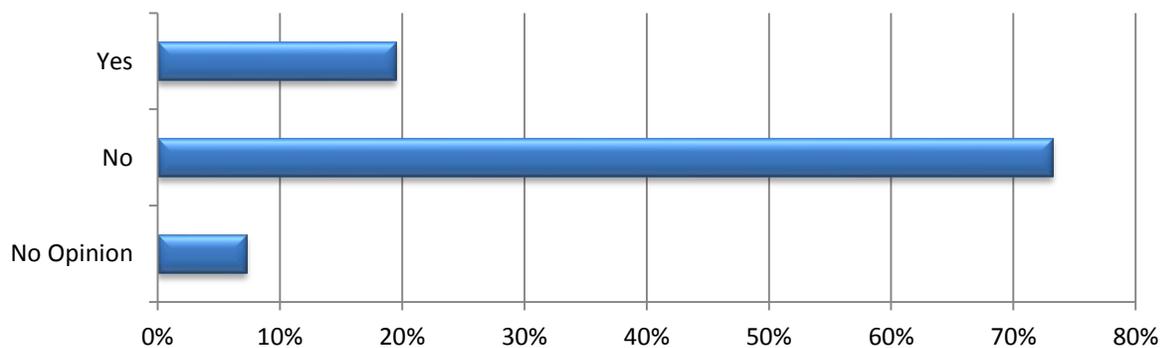
### Is Your Business Located in Americus?



### Professional Sector of Respondent



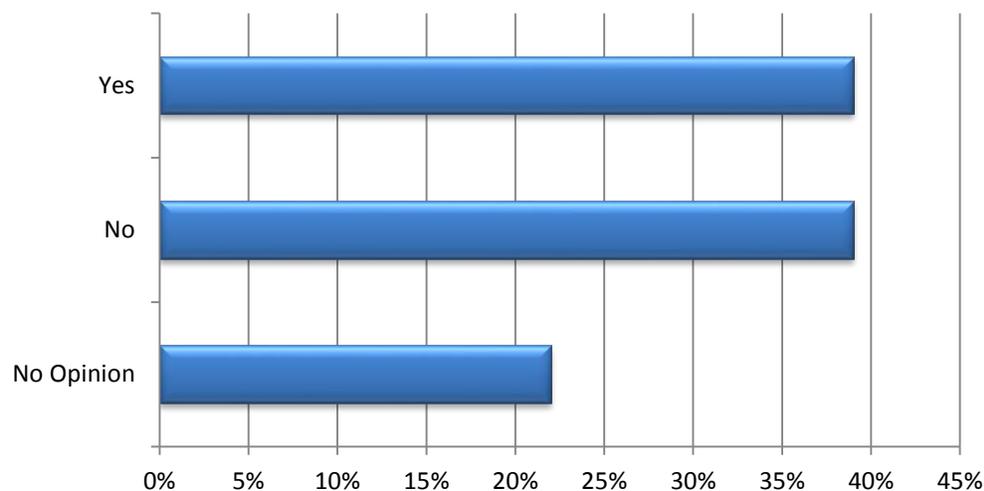
When asked about economic development in Americus and Sumter County, nearly three-fourths of respondents did not believe Americus has been successful in its economic development.



When survey participants were asked to comment as to why they did or did not believe Americus and Sumter County had been successful in its economic development, 62% provided answers and several themes emerged from these open-ended responses. The most commonly mentioned barrier to economic development (31% of responses) entailed concern about the **public education system** and its effect on attracting businesses and residents to the community.

Other major themes that emerged from these open-ended responses included concerns about the effectiveness of leadership to recruit new businesses to the area (23%), community divisiveness (15%), and traditional attitudes that inhibit forward progress for the community (12%).

The survey also asked “Are there any local characteristics, policies, or procedures that adversely affect your business?” Nearly 40% of respondents indicated that there are attributes of the local community that adversely affect their ability to conduct or grow their business.



When these respondents were asked to describe which community attributes have the most negative effect on their ability to conduct business in Americus, the three most commonly mentioned issues were: (1) public education system (50%); (2) community division (31%); and (3) local taxes (19%).

*“I have had 3 families this week come in to change their address, they are moving because of the school. So not only is it affecting growth, but it is also causing folks to leave.”*

*“The most poignant local characteristic of Americus is its division. There is no sense of connectedness or familiarity. Businesses only advocate for their individual business and not for Americus-Sumter as a whole. ... There is a lack of personality in Americus. Who are we? What do we offer collectively? This lack of identity keeps us from being recognized, therefore negatively impacting tourism and the local economy. If people don't come... business doesn't grow.”*

*“Taxes are out of line for our community. Our city and county governments have got to work together, maybe consolidate services to lower overhead for the cost of services we receive.”*

Other barriers that were mentioned include restrictive alcohol laws (open container and the food-to-alcohol ratio required for local restaurants); concerns about local leadership; and the current state of the downtown area (e.g., empty buildings, quality of sidewalks, trash, poor lighting).

Nearly half (46%) of survey respondents thought that the leaders of Americus/Sumter County could implement policies to support or expand their existing business. The most common suggestion involved improving the public school system (i.e., 35% of those offering suggestions). **One-fourth of those offering suggestions wanted local leaders to provide incentives for the creation or location of new businesses to Americus.** Some of the specific ideas include:

- Waiving fees for new businesses for a period of time.
- Offering city land or businesses rent free to new businesses for a period of time.
- Investing in technology, especially high-speed internet.
- Leveraging the low cost of living and small-city lifestyle to recruit new businesses.
- Encouraging new restaurants, coffee shops, bookstores, and other businesses to open in Americus that would cater to college students and young professionals.

Respondents also mentioned the importance of providing public recognition of existing businesses for their contributions. This could be achieved by offering a “Business of the Month” award, with an accompanying write-up in the local paper. Other suggestions for local leaders included: (1) standardizing the process for interpreting local ordinances for businesses; (2) cleaning up the trash on the streets around town; and (3) doing a better job of leveraging the local colleges for workforce development; (4) using local businesses for government contracts when possible; and (5) investing money into marketing Sumter County as place with two national historic sites.

## SWOT ANALYSIS

Based on the findings from our survey of employees and employers in Americus, additional research efforts, and the collective expertise of the team, the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges were identified concerning missed economic opportunities in Americus.

### **Strengths**

- Americus has two institutions of higher education (Georgia Southwestern State University and South Georgia Technical College). Graduates of these institutions could potentially contribute to the labor force if there is a match between the skills that are obtained and the job opportunities in the local economy.
- The community has a lot to offer tourists – a rich culture, local attractions, and two National Historic Sites and the upcoming construction of a new Motorsports Complex.
- The low cost of real estate.
- The headquarters of a world-renowned non-profit organization (i.e., Habitat for Humanity) are located in Americus.

### **Weaknesses**

- Concerns about the quality of public education system in Sumter County.
- The current state of the downtown area inhibits tourism and economic development. Concerns include the number of empty buildings, the quality of the sidewalks, poor lighting, and the presence of trash.
- Lack of businesses with products and hours (e.g., coffee shops, bookstore, etc.) that cater to students and young professionals, students leave on the weekends and most students leave Americus after graduating from the local college and university.
- Restrictive food/alcohol policies that prohibit bars.

### **Opportunities**

- With a local college and university located in Americus, there is a potential labor pool of young entrepreneurs.
- As the home of the headquarters for Habitat for Humanity, Americus has a foundation for a local culture that could support other non-profit organizations.
- Improved investment in and coordination of marketing efforts to potential tourists could benefit the entire community.

## **Threats**

- Without creating businesses that cater to and create more social opportunities for young professionals (e.g., coffee shop, bowling alley), it will be difficult to attract these individuals to the community.
- Underachieving school system
- Community division
- Other South Georgia and nearby Alabama cities that may be proactive in creating a sustainable economic framework that will attract people and business.

## ***What economic opportunities is Americus/Sumter County missing out on?***

# RECOMMENDATIONS

We developed three ideas for Americus/Sumter County to consider in its economic development strategy:

1. Promote Americus as a leader in alternative energy.
2. Encourage the creation and sustainable operation of 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations.
3. Invest in a comprehensive small business incubator.

Within each of these ideas, we have outlined our idea, the scope of the initiative, recommended action steps, a timeline and budget and identified possible funding opportunities as well as what might be measures of success.



## Promote Americus as a leader in biomass and solar energy

### Recommendations

Through embracing and promoting alternative energy, Americus can protect its agricultural heritage and character while promoting innovation and leadership in Georgia and the Southeast.

*“Developing and commercializing energy solutions can be achieved with less risk at a lower cost in Georgia. Georgia is the country’s leading source of sustainable biomass and has an abundance of renewable natural resources such as pine trees, 10 million acres of agricultural land, and new alternative energy crops including renewable, fast-growing Giant Miscanthus.*

*Energy solution providers are able to accelerate renewable energy solutions in a lower-risk environment, with quick and easy access to global markets, due to Georgia’s smart tax incentives, access to the top source for commercial timberland in the U.S., innovative industry research, and Georgia’s global logistics “super network.” Electricity costs below the national average will help solar technology manufacturers and renewable energy producers control their operating budgets, as well.*

*Georgia’s business-friendly energy ecosystem lowers costs and increases competitive advantage for businesses in the solar, wind, smart grid, biofuel, battery and fuel cell fields. In addition, energy solutions providers located in Atlanta join an environment and business culture that leads the nation in energy conservation, with more than three million square feet of LEED certified buildings.”*

Georgia Department of Economic Development

<http://georgia.org/industries/energy-solutions-environment/Pages/default.aspx>

### Scope of the Initiative

#### Biomass

Agriculture is a major part of the lifestyle and heritage of southwest Georgia. Yet many farmers, especially those who manage small farms, struggle to compete with the crop production of large corporate farms. The production of crops for biomass provides a viable alternative to maintain the agricultural heritage of the region while moving Georgia away from its current heavy reliance on non-renewable energy sources. Georgia’s abundant forestry resources are already moving the state forward for biomass production. Georgia Biomass (subsidiary of a German company) built the biomass plant in Valdosta, which is the largest one in Georgia. They export wood pellets for biomass use in Europe.

*Forbes* magazine ranked Georgia third in the nation for potential biomass energy as measured by the amount of biomass available in the state. In addition, Georgia ranks No. 1 in the nation for commercial timberland and boasts 10 million acres of agricultural land.<sup>3</sup>

Much of the interest in biomass in Georgia seems to be for the production of pellets, for export to Europe. With Georgia's rail, air and port transportation infrastructure, it has the logistical support needed to facilitate wide-spread export of biomass material. The establishment of the "inland port" in Cordele further enhances export capabilities. While this model can help to establish the production side of biomass for Georgia, Americus might also utilize the material locally. The environmental benefits of biomass energy production are significantly reduced when the material is exported, especially such long distances.

The Herty Advanced Materials Development Center, located in Savannah, is the U.S. leader in biomass technology research. In fact, in February 2013, Herty announced:

*[It] has opened the first fully-integrated pilot pellet mill in the United States. At a cost of nearly \$2 million, Herty's pilot pellet mill represents an investment in state-of-the-art process equipment that is designed to support local and national feedstock suppliers providing them with a facility for validating process technology and for engineering pellet design. Herty will work with both technology providers and project developers to mitigate risk through pilot scale validation and de-risk their development projects. Herty will also support researchers working to enhance pellet design and develop methods for lowering operating costs.*<sup>4</sup>

According to the Repeve Renewables website, biomass can be mixed with coal in traditional coal power plans without making any alterations to the plant.

In addition to pellets made from timber, giant miscanthus is an extremely fast-growing perennial hybrid grass that is grown specifically for energy production. Because it is not a food crop, it does not impact commercial food markets or prices. The production of giant miscanthus can enable once active agricultural lands to return to very high levels of productivity. It requires little water and can grow in marginal soils.

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<sup>3</sup> "Georgia is a Leader in Biomass" <http://www.renewableenergyworld.com/rea/news/article/2010/04/georgia-is-a-leader-in-biomass>

<sup>4</sup> "Herty Opens First Fully-integrated Pilot Pellet Mill in U.S." [http://www.herty.com/articles/Pellet%20Line%20Press%20Release%2002042013%20Final%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.herty.com/articles/Pellet%20Line%20Press%20Release%2002042013%20Final%20(2).pdf)

## IT'S ABOUT MORE THAN GROWING ENERGY. IT'S ABOUT GROWING JOBS.

The cultivation of FREEDOM giant miscanthus in rural areas can have immediate positive impacts:

- One biorefinery can generate over 300 direct and indirect jobs.
- FREEDOM giant miscanthus will be grown local to each facility, thereby creating jobs immediately in the area.

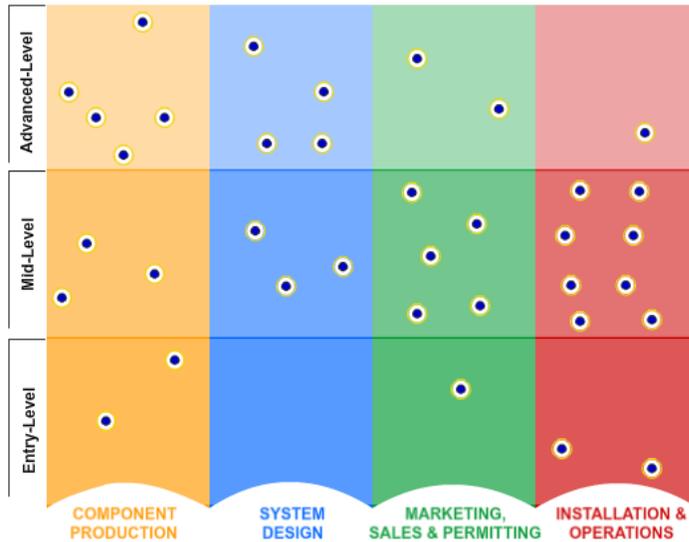
Source: <http://giantmiscanthus.com/docs/FreedomPolicymaker-PM1010d.pdf>

### Solar Energy



Georgia is tied for 10th among the states with the greatest energy potential from solar power, according to a sun index developed for the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) using data provided by NREL's Renewable Resource Data Center. In addition, solar potential in the southern portion of the state is greater than the northern area. By actively promoting or incentivizing the use of solar in Americus, the community can become a driving force in the widespread adoption of solar across the state.

There are a wide range of job opportunities available in the solar industry. The chart below, developed by the U.S. Department of Energy (<http://www1.eere.energy.gov/solar/careermap/>), shows the diversity of opportunities available. Working with South Georgia Technical College, roofers, electricians, and other skilled workers in the community can receive additional training to accelerate the capacity of a trained workforce for solar installations. With an aggressive goal of solar installations in the community – such as a goal for all buildings in downtown to have solar panels – Americus could promote their embrace of alternative energy sources as a marketing tool for young, progressive audience they are looking to attract.



As of September 2012<sup>5</sup>,

- Eighty-six percent of the nearly 14,000 new solar workers added since August 2011 represent new jobs, rather than existing positions that have added solar responsibilities.
- Installers added the most solar workers over the past year, more than offsetting declines in manufacturing. While this subsector is dominated by small firms, employment is growing most dramatically at larger firms, suggesting consolidation and maturation of the installation sector.
- Solar employment is expected to grow by 17.2 percent over the next 12 months, representing the addition of approximately 20,000 new solar workers. Forty-four percent of all solar firms expect to add solar employees during this period.
- Employers from all of the solar industry subsectors examined in this study expect significant employment growth over the next 12 months, with nearly all of them projecting percentage job growth in the double-digits.
- Nearly half of installation firms expect to add solar workers in the next year, adding a total of nearly 12,000 jobs (21 percent growth year-over-year).

Solar energy is a major initiative of the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). The DOE SunShot Initiative is “a collaborative national initiative to make solar energy cost competitive with other forms of energy by the end of the decade. Reducing the installed cost of solar energy systems by about 75% will drive widespread, large-scale adoption of this renewable energy technology and restore U.S. leadership in the

<sup>5</sup> <http://thesolarfoundation.org/research/national-solar-jobs-census-2012>

global clean energy race.”<sup>6</sup> According to the website, this initiative has funded \$4.3 million in research to the Georgia Tech Applied Research Corporation.

MAGE SOLAR USA, has its US headquarters based in Dublin, Georgia, and offers turn-key PV-solutions for residential, commercial, agricultural and utility scale applications. The presence of a major solar manufacturer already in Georgia is a major asset for increasing the potential of solar of Georgia.

### **Recommended action steps**

#### 1. Education

- Increase awareness among home builders and contractors about solar, including costs, installation and other relevant information.
- Increase awareness among consumers (home owners, commercial building owners, etc.) regarding state and federal tax incentives for alternative energy

#### 2. Enhance the marketplace

- Local government incentives/regulations to promote installation of solar panels, green building (such as LEED certification)

#### 3. Provide training

- Establish Green Building technology program at South Georgia Technical College. This program could be modeled after the program at Savannah Technical College (currently the only one in Georgia)
- In the interim, training is currently provided at the Mage Solar Academy.

#### 4. Identify local sources of biomass

- Work with local farmers who are interested in producing crops/timber for biomass pellet production.
- REPREVE Renewables LLC, headquartered in Soperton, Georgia, is a commercial grower of giant miscanthus.

### **Timeline (including short, medium and long term goals/actions)**

#### Short-term:

- Create a Steering Committee of representatives from the City, County, Development Authority, South Georgia Technical College (SGTC), Georgia Southwestern, and other community partners to guide the Alternative Energy Initiative.
- Review the Department of Energy local government toolkit (see resource link below) to develop strategies specific to Americus/Sumter County to encourage the use of solar.

#### Medium-term:

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www1.eere.energy.gov/solar/sunshot/index.html>

- Establish partnerships/relationships within the biomass industry to 1) tap into existing resources and expertise, and 2) to develop the supply chain from Americas to potential end users.
- Establish job training programs to train/retrain contractors for solar installations.
- Conduct community-wide education campaign about the benefits of alternative energy to create demand for solar installations.
- Inventory potential sites for growing biomass (timber and/or giant miscanthus).

Long-term:

- Establish a staff position or responsibilities under an existing position to serve as a point person for alternative energy initiatives in the community.
- Create a network of farmers who grow biomass products and work collaboratively to export their crops.
- Develop a biomass facility locally.

#### **Possible Funding Opportunities/Resources/Partnerships**

- Herty Advanced Materials Development Center ([www.herty.com](http://www.herty.com))
- Strategic Energy Institute – Georgia Tech (<http://www.energy.gatech.edu/index.php>)
- Georgia’s Center for Innovation and Energy (<http://georgia.org/business-resources/Pages/georgia-centers-innovation.aspx>)
- Georgia Solar ([www.gasolar.org](http://www.gasolar.org))
  - REPREEVE Renewables LLC (<http://giantmiscanthus.com/index.html>)
- SunShot – U.S. Dept. of Energy (<http://www1.eere.energy.gov/solar/sunshot/index.html>)
- U.S. Department of Energy Tool Kit to Build Sustainable Local Solar Markets ([http://www4.eere.energy.gov/solar/sunshot/resource\\_center/sites/default/files/solar-powering-your-community-guide-for-local-governments.pdf](http://www4.eere.energy.gov/solar/sunshot/resource_center/sites/default/files/solar-powering-your-community-guide-for-local-governments.pdf)) Note: This is an in-depth guide to strategies and case studies for local governments interested in promoting solar in their own communities. Great resource.
- US Green Building Council, Georgia Chapter ([www.usgbcga.org](http://www.usgbcga.org))
- Southface ([www.southface.org](http://www.southface.org))
- The Solar Foundation ([www.solarfoundation.org](http://www.solarfoundation.org))

## Encourage the creation and sustainable operation of 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations

### Recommendation

Make Americus/Sumter County a friendly and supportive place for 501(c)(3) organizations to start and maintain successful operations.

### Scope of Initiative

Americus is home to several large non-profit organizations, including Habitat for Humanity. If the story of Americus is one of being friendly and open to non-profit organizations, we recommend supporting and fostering the non-profit culture in a way that attracts other non-profits to Americus.

Tax exempt organizations under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code are “organized and operated exclusively for exempt purposes...”<sup>7</sup> These organizations often have a social, economic, political or civic mission. A non-profit organization use surplus revenues to achieve its goals rather than distributing them as profit or dividends.

Non-profit organizations do not just provide good to the community, they make good economic sense. According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics, nonprofits accounted for 9.2% of all wages and salaries paid in the United States in 2010, and were 5.5% of the state’s GDP in 2012.<sup>8</sup> In Georgia, 13.2% of people work in the nonprofit sector.<sup>9</sup>

*The economic impacts of nonprofit organizations are often given little attention by traditional economic theory and applied economics. In fact, policymakers frequently regard the role of nonprofits as ancillary to the economic well-being of local communities, choosing instead to focus the majority of their time and attention on analyzing and supporting the growth potential of the for-profit sector. However, there is inestimable value in looking at the nonprofit sector’s economic impact in our State.<sup>10</sup>*

Non-profit organizations provide jobs, the backbone of a successful economic development strategy. In fact, the National Conference on Citizenship published a report in September 2012 that found that “a

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.irs.gov/Charities-&-Non-Profits/Charitable-Organizations/Exemption-Requirements-Section-501\(c\)\(3\)-Organizations](http://www.irs.gov/Charities-&-Non-Profits/Charitable-Organizations/Exemption-Requirements-Section-501(c)(3)-Organizations)

<sup>8</sup> <http://nccs.urban.org/statistics/quickfacts.cfm>

<sup>9</sup> The Economic Impact of Georgia’s Nonprofit Sector, Georgia Center for Nonprofit in Partnership with Georgia Institute of Technology, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> The Economic Impact of Georgia’s Nonprofit Sector, Georgia Center for Nonprofit in Partnership with Georgia Institute of Technology, 2012.

county with one extra nonprofit per 1,000 people in 2005 would have half a percentage point less unemployment by 2009.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Recommended action steps**

1. **Provide training and technical assistance to non-profits organizations on relevant nonprofit topics to nonprofits leaders.** This might include board governance, resource development and volunteer management. We do not recommend helping non-profit organizations get started, rather, focus on the non-profit organizations that are already in place. Help those strengthen and grow through solid strategic planning and resource planning. This type of training could be offered through the Chamber of Commerce and offered for a small fee for each participating organization and underwritten by a foundation or larger non-profit.
2. **Create a system in which non-profits looking for volunteers can connect with citizens who are interested in volunteering.** The “HandsOn Network” is a network of organizations that connects people looking for flexible volunteer opportunities with nonprofit organizations. Currently there are HandsOn organizations include locations in Atlanta, Northeast Georgia and Macon. The existence of this type of service or organization provides nonprofit organizations with an easy way to access potential volunteers. Although the Network is not currently accepting new members to become “HandsOn Action Centers”, there is a mailing list for when the Network is accepting new members. In the meantime, we recommend recruiting college students or asking a group of leaders in the community to begin this work of connecting non-profit organizations with volunteers.

### **Timeline**

#### Short-term:

- Research potential training providers, including expertise at existing non-profits
- Survey existing non-profit organizations on training needs
- Identify potential sources of funding to support training program
- Survey existing non-profit organizations on volunteer needs
- Develop web strategy for creating the network
- Identify potential groups capable and interested in working on website

#### Medium-term:

- Set schedule of training events

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<sup>11</sup> Civic Health and Unemployment II: The Case Builds. Produced by National Conference on Citizenship. 2012 Issue Brief.

- Advertise and recruit cohort of non-profit organizations
- Create website
- Recruit volunteers

Long-term:

- Provide training for cohort of nonprofit leaders
- Investigate possibility of other training, including one time training on key topics of interest
- Provide funding to maintain website
- Promote stories about successful matching of volunteers with organizations
- Recruit businesses to provide incentives to people who volunteer and document volunteer hours

### **Budget**

- Training for existing non-profits: \$20,000-\$30,000
- Website design and construction for online connection site: \$20,000

### **Potential Resources**

- HandsOn Network
  - <http://www.handsonnetwork.org/>
- J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development, University of Georgia
  - [www.fanning.uga.edu](http://www.fanning.uga.edu)

### **Possible Funding Opportunities**

- Mattie H. Marshall Foundation
- Local Universities
- Chamber of Commerce

## Develop and invest in a comprehensive small business incubator

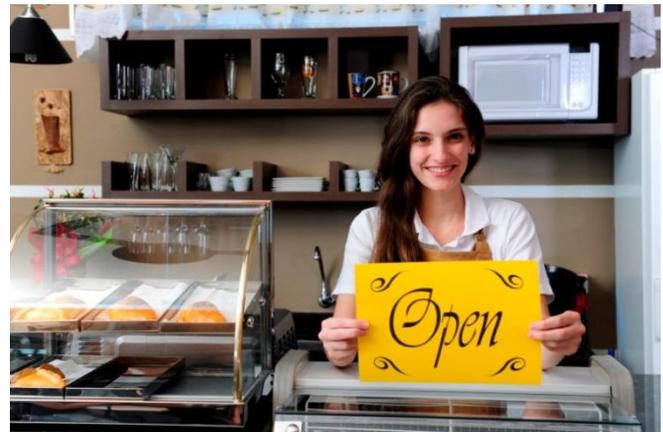
### Recommendations/Initiative

**Develop a comprehensive small business incubator to promote local job creation and economic self-sufficiency** - Americus/Sumter County needs an active and strong small business incubator that provides technical assistance and support to entrepreneurs interested in starting a business in or relocating to the area.

### Scope of the Initiative

There is currently a business incubator in Americus - Business Expansion Center (BEC) - which is run by South Georgia Technical College (SGTC). The BEC currently gives startup companies free office space, and limited business development services. While there is an unofficial partnership between SGTC and Georgia Southwestern (GSW) to provide these services, the BEC could be more effective if a more formal relationship were established.

Currently, the BEC is under the direct supervision of the VP of Economic Development Services at SGTC. The incubator has direct access to resources at SGTC, and a loose tie to GSW.



### Recommended action steps

1. **Create a joint partnership between GSW and SGTC.** We propose that the incubator become a joint partnership between GSW and SGTC. The space can continue to be provided by SGTC in the short term, while the help for business development would be run through GSW's Center for Business and Economic Development. GSW has dedicated staff to business development, as well as classes (such as Enactus, formerly Students in Free Enterprise) that could provide business help to start ups. By getting GSW and its students more involved, the business incubator will better market the incubator to entrepreneurial minded students at GSW, who

may want to try and start a business after graduation, and who may wish to stay in the Americus area.

2. **Hire a full-time Executive Director**
3. **Rebrand BEC** with a more memorable and catchier name in order to appeal to creative entrepreneurs. Examples from other cities include: The Innovation Factory (Duluth) and The Edge Connection (Kennesaw).
4. **Relocate to downtown Americus.** We propose that the incubator relocate to downtown Americus for two primary reasons – to make the incubator more visible to the local community members, and to increase tenant occupation in downtown Americus thereby creating more vibrancy in the heart of the community. Examples of colleges supporting incubation growth in city centers include Georgia Tech’s Technology Square in midtown Atlanta and Georgia Southern University’s Entrepreneurship Center (a.k.a. the E-Zone) in downtown Statesboro.

#### **Timeline (including short, medium and long term goals/actions)**

##### Short-term:

- Create joint partnership between GSW and SGTC
- Seek funding for at least the first 3 years of operation
- Hire full-time Executive Director funded by GSW or SGTC or a combination of the two

##### Medium-term:

- Rebrand BEC
- Create dedicated website with information, tools and resources for local entrepreneurs
- Create 3-5 year strategic plan
  - While providing resources to all local entrepreneurs, additional services should be developed to target low-to-moderate income women and minorities. Providing an environment conducive to nurturing underserved entrepreneurs will contribute to local economic growth while providing a means to support themselves, their families and their communities.
  - While the incubator should help support small businesses that align to the key industries in Georgia - including Agribusiness, Arts, Automotive, Energy and Environment, Entertainment, Financial Services, Food Processing, Information Technology, Life Sciences, Logistics & Transportation, Manufacturing and Tourism – it should also nurture nonprofit startups and businesses unique and specific to Sumter County.

##### Long-term:

- Hire additional staff (as appropriate)

- Relocate to downtown Americus - The City of Americus, Sumter County, and the Americus Sumter PDA should partner to pay the rent of a downtown location. In order to do this without affecting their budgets, the BEC should remain at South Georgia Technical College while Americus and Sumter County remains an Archway community. When Americus and Sumter County graduate from the Archway program, the city, county, and PDA should divert funds currently going to Archway to pay rent for a downtown location for the BEC. This would be a total amount of \$30,000, which should cover any downtown rental for the BEC. If additional funds were needed, the Downtown Development Authority could be approached as a potential partner, as the increase in jobs at the BEC would generate more foot traffic in the downtown area.

### **Budget**

Staff (\$50,000): The incubator needs a full-time staff person that is solely dedicated to fulfilling its mission and fundraising including grant funding and low interest loan opportunities. All requests out of the BEC directed to one person will alleviate the burden on the Center for Business and Economic Development at GSW, the Economic Development Department at SGTC, and any other locals who choose to donate time or resources to the BEC. This position, depending on which school were able to fund it, could report either to Wally Summers at SGTC, or Gaynor Cheokas at GSW.

Location (\$TBD): For the incubator to reach its full potential, it needs more exposure and support from the community. Partner with local architect or architecture program (i.e. GA Tech) to develop space in downtown location at free or reduced pricing. Create innovative space that nurtures local entrepreneurs to reach their full potential (i.e. office space with ergonomic desks and chairs, thinking couches, roundtable conference rooms, and high-speed internet/video conferencing services).

Tools/Resources (\$TBD): Seek funding for cutting edge technology (i.e. a free Apple computer for each entrepreneur with a solid business plan who has been approved for traditional or nontraditional start up financing).

### **Possible Funding Opportunities/Resources/Partnerships**

Funding for Incubator: Seek funding from GSW and SGTC as well as government, private, corporate and nonprofit funding sources. In addition, a small rental fees could be charged to entrepreneurs who rent office space at downtown location.

### **Resources:**

- North Carolina Business Incubator Association: <http://www.ncincubation.org/>
- US Small Business Administration: <http://www.sba.gov/>
- Georgia Small Business Resource Directory: <http://www.georgia.org/business-resources/small-business-resources/Pages/default.aspx>

**Partnerships:**

- There are several neighboring small business incubators (for complete list of small business incubators in Georgia please see appendix). It is recommended to develop strong partnerships with these centers in order to develop similar and complementary services for Americus.
  - Southwest Georgia Business Development Center (Vienna)
  - Columbus Regional Technical Incubator (Columbus)
  - Albany State University Community Dev. Corp. Business Assistance Center (Albany)
  - Microbusiness Enterprise Center (Albany)
  - Georgia Center of Innovation for Agribusiness (Tifton)
  - Fort Valley State University Entrepreneur Center (Fort Valley)

**Expected impact / Measures of Success**

Growth of jobs in Americus by accelerating success of entrepreneurial companies through an innovative array of business support resources and service

## Group 2

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*How can Americus/Sumter  
County attract the young,  
entrepreneurial and/or  
retirees?*

# Group 2 Contents

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## BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

Like many towns throughout the southeast, Americus' rise was directly linked to the arrival of the railroads, sparking a time of economic expansion and employment opportunities for much of southwest Georgia. Prior to this, Americus was primarily a courthouse town and existed in the shadow on neighboring Danville, located on the Flint River. Between 1850 and 1860 the number of Americus residents increased twentyfold.

The outbreak of the Civil War resulted in nearby Camp Sumter serving as a prison for Union soldiers, a historic site visited by many tourists to this day. During the war, the entire town of Americus was converted to a large-scale Confederate hospital.

The region's industrial capabilities continued to expand, as the town saw early investments in education with the creation of the Third District Agricultural and Mechanical School (now Georgia Southwestern State University) and the South Georgia Trade and Vocational School (now South Georgia Technical College). These early investments in education remain important to the town's economic capabilities.

Located amongst a number of historic sites (political, military, agricultural, and philanthropic), and hosting a wealth of antebellum and Victorian architecture, Americus enters the twenty-first century with the most diversified economy in its history. Yet the decline in domestic manufacturing has resulted in the local economy being driven overwhelmingly by agribusiness. Remarkably, the area's population has remained stagnant for 100 years. Indeed, despite significant institutions like Georgia Southwestern and South Georgia Technical College, Americus has had a difficult time attracting and keeping young people.



## ***How Can Americus and Sumter County attract and retain the young, entrepreneurial and retirees?***

The urbanization of America coupled with cycles of recession has left many rural downtowns with empty storefronts, a lack of vibrancy, and a small tax base. Rural America is struggling to compete with the employment and cultural offerings of larger metropolitan areas that attract a young, educated workforce. **Americus and Sumter County can make themselves attractive to young people, entrepreneurs, and retirees by launching initiatives to (1) bring people and businesses back to downtown, and (2) establish and promote Americus and Sumter County as the healthiest community in Georgia.**

Following the industrial revolution, downtowns were the lifeblood of the city, giving birth to a period of iconic architecture, robust infrastructure, and walkability creating a thriving, vibrant cultural base. However, globalization and technological advances caused many of the factories and mills to close doors, forcing a large share of the labor force to migrate to larger cities for employment opportunities often in the service sector and other white collar jobs. Rural towns have yet to regain this demographic on a significant scale, and the resulting strain on rural downtowns is seen throughout the country.

Americus' economy is overwhelming dependent on agriculture. With less day-to-day interaction or office space needed in this industry, the town sees continued geographic division, lessening the likelihood of residents traveling into the downtown area.

Coming out of the recession, many towns within the Sun Belt are seeing revitalization in downtown areas, as these cities now realize the downtown core is truly the face and brand for an area. Demographic trends continue to support migration trends to the Sun Belt as people seek more a temperate climate. Larger cities are attempting to recreate the historic architecture and wide streets seen in small town America. A healthy downtown core is a vital piece in any economic development strategy. A vibrant, cultural experience draws young professionals, encourages a healthy tourism economy, and increases city revenues through increased tax values. This project highlights approaches to increasing the vitality of the historic downtown "main street" for the continued success of Americus.

Economic vitality, sense of place, and physical and mental health are all interrelated contributors to quality of life for a community. Approaching health, wellness, and community vibrancy together, in a diverse and comprehensive proposal, gives the region the strongest vision for the future, in order to keep and attract the young people, entrepreneurs, and retirees. What follows are two proposals for drawing this target audience to Americus and Sumter County: **Main Street Americus** and **Georgia's Healthiest Community**.

## DRIVING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In its historical downtown, Americus is blessed with a tremendous asset that many larger metropolitan areas invest millions in attempts to recreate: walkable streets, beautiful architecture, street-front retail and density. We propose an economic development strategy built upon leveraging this fixed asset, and the equally valuable asset comprised of the region's citizens, to create a vibrant, and healthy city, further enhancing the appeal of the region across all demographics. The overall goals of the proposal include:

- Revive and repurpose past public engagement initiatives
- Cultivate mass appeal for businesses and consumers in the downtown area
- Cultivate a "voice" for the downtown area: a brand created and owned by its citizens
- Foster community engagement focusing on a no- or low-cost model
- Protect and improve the existing assets of the downtown area

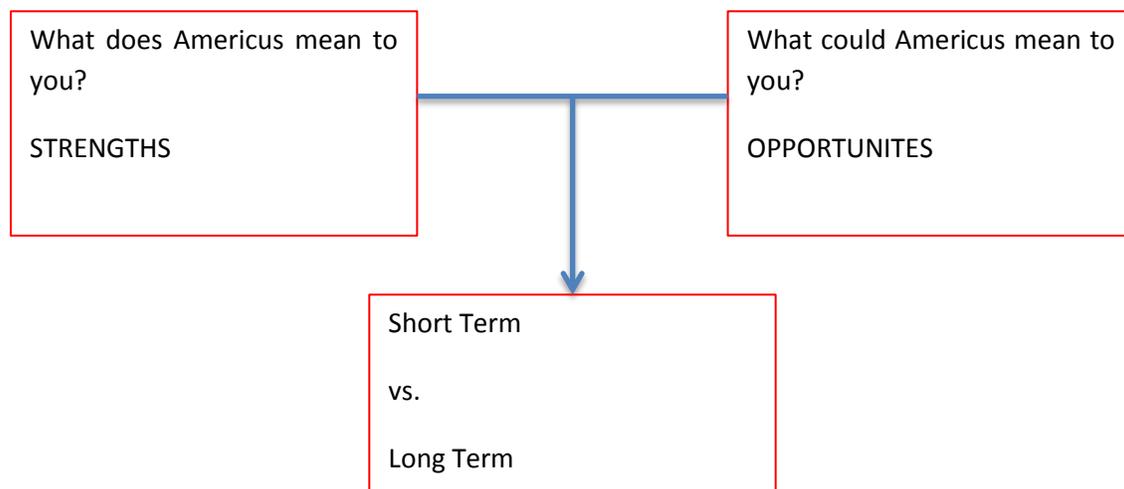


To begin any sort of community outreach project, Americus must first understand the drivers in the community. We propose beginning by first identifying all key decision makers and influencers in the community; creating a document listing all key business owners, philanthropic and community leaders, political leaders, real estate property owners, key corporate citizens, and prominent citizens. From this group of influence, identify ten (10) committed and engaged to serve as the core principle. Each member of this group is then assigned a small number of additional members (3-5). This pattern may continue until the initial pool of influence is complete, but with a different object then past initiatives. The primary purpose of the group is to foster a proactive approach to community engagement.

Similar to the past listening sessions with the Archway Partnership Project, we propose creating a public roundtable session to help craft the brand and vision for downtown. The reason for the repetition of such an initiative is to create ownership and authorship by the citizens of Americus. By inclusion in the creation stage, Americus is less likely to face opposition as we move to implementation.

Each member of the ten (10) member core group is charged with reaching out personally to the citizens assigned, and encouraging their participation in a three (3) session series focused specifically on the downtown area. We propose the following format:

- *Session One: What Makes Downtown Americus Unique?* The first session is centered in identifying what draws people to downtown Americus; what are the reasons we are all here? It is important to limit this first session only to positive aspects of the area; not concerns, not worries or complaints, but strictly identifying the drivers for the downtown area.
- *Session Two: In an ideal world, how would we envision the downtown area in ten (10) years?* Again, the theme of the session is a positive visioning of the downtown area. We have our brand, now what would we like the brand to become?
- *Session Three: How do we prioritize these findings of strengths and opportunities into short and long term actionable proposals?*



## MAIN STREET AMERICUS

A strong, vibrant downtown is the primary indicator of the economic and cultural health of a city. As young professionals and retirees consider where to begin those stages of their lives, both groups look to a downtown as the cultural barometer for quality of life in a city. The cities and towns investing in their downtowns are winning the battle of recruiting coveted demographics such as the young families and the retiring baby boomer generation. In addition, a strong downtown serves as a unifier to the residents of a town, especially in the geographically dispersed towns found throughout the Southeast. Serving as the face of a city, a strong downtown is critical to cultivating a sense of place, quality of life, and overall health and community involvement. The following segment includes ideas centered on the continued expansion of the downtown Americus region.



## DOWNTOWN ANCHORS/COMMUNITY NODES

### **POP-UP/TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS/EVENTS IN VACANT STOREFRONTS**

Encouraging and supporting a variety of retail businesses that encourage foot traffic and browsing (bookstores, coffee shops, flower shops, bakeries, toy stores, clothing boutiques, houseware shops, or antique stores), the DDA should sponsor pop-up storefronts showcasing local artists, a small lending library from local authors, or photography that highlights the region's history. These pop-ups could be staged as rotating galleries/discussion spaces, complete with coffee or food from downtown institutions such as Café Campesino or Monroe's. Activating empty storefronts beautifies the community and adds foot traffic and curiosity, which serve as a non-capital-intensive form of marketing for the properties. Current programs provide examples of short-term occupants becoming long-term. Coordinating these pop-up storefronts with regular downtown events would build the market for more permanent retail, perhaps incentivized by reduced rent or tax breaks. Similar projects are currently being explored for pilot programs in other metropolitan areas. Recently, many such initiatives have been housed within a 501(C)(3) non-profit entity that serves as a bridge between property owners and potential retailers. The purpose of a central organizing entity is to provide an overarching structure to mitigate the risk of such an arrangement. Examples may include a group carrying an umbrella insurance policy to cover general liability obligations required by many property owners and commercial lenders.

**Entrepreneurial opportunity:** Incubator competition for funding and ongoing support.

**Potential Partnerships:** GSW and other area art departments; local artists, Lake Blackshear Regional Library, Café Campesino, and Civic Spaces (which is currently in the infancy stages in Atlanta).

### **PROMOTING DOWNTOWN LIVING**

A vibrant downtown should have a constant presence of citizens, and attractive downtown residential options are a large contributor to 24-hour vitality. The City should consider the expanding all existing residential incentives into a comprehensive package, including tax abatements (state and federal), potential historic preservation funding, matching façade grants, waiving of permit fees, etc. These funds would serve as bridge or gap financing opportunities to mitigate the risk of private investment.

The participation of two key parties is needed: a developer with financing and a commitment to downtown Americus and the City of Americus itself. With low interest rates, reasonable acquisition prices, tax credits for restoring historic buildings, and incentives from Americus, the City can encourage private investment in the historic structures downtown. With the increase in population, Americus will benefit from an expanding tax base, enhanced social vibrancy, and a more vibrant downtown economy. The proposed incentive packages should also include business planning assistance with directories of the kinds of vendors/professionals that are most commonly needed for new businesses: legal, accounting, downtown district membership information, etc. The Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Development Authority can assist in this effort.

Because Americus already has substantial infrastructure downtown, its best potential return on the investment of capital is in that area. “Green-field” developments, which may have lower private sector capital requirements, result in higher public sector spending due to a need for substantial infrastructure improvements.

Critical questions must be addressed before the City moves forward with any public project in order to ensure the investment is a positive step in achieving the goals identified for the downtown area. In particular, City leaders should evaluate how each improvement will serve to attract business. Furthermore, each project should be evaluated based on its likelihood of enhancing the brand of the downtown area and Americus as a whole.

**Example:** Renovating the Furlow School building. This would be a collaboration between the City, the County and GSW to transform downtown. It would open another corridor along Jackson Street bridging downtown and the nearby historic homes. It would encourage students to get outside of the campus bubble and to develop a love for the area that many local residents enjoy. Similar projects have been successful in increasing the connectedness between Columbus State and the Savannah College of Art and Design and their respective downtowns. This project might also draw private developers back to downtown Americus to take advantage of the older homes for sale on Jackson Street.

#### **FOOD/DRINK DISTRICT** (“Restaurant Row”, or “Epicurean/Gastro District”)

Designating a Gastro District downtown to be a concentration of restaurants providing a range of food, drink, and social gathering options can provide another draw and a potential anchor for downtown Americus. There are a number of successful precedents in towns with similar food/alcohol regulations. Successful districts have (1) a diversity of options, (2) attractive supplemental programming (usually involving the arts), (3) ample indoor and outdoor gathering and dining space, and (4) community investment/buy in. Other communities have had success with focusing on craft beer, creative pub food or artisan pizza, a wine bar with small plates, and cuisine specific to local ethnicities that might be underrepresented in the current culinary offerings.

**Precedents:** Decatur, GA

**Scope:** This project might start with food trucks or temporary food events, in conjunction with weekly or monthly festivals. After evolving to brick and mortar versions, all establishments could continue to collaborate, rather than compete, in a monthly or seasonal ‘moveable feast’ or restaurant crawl, offering discounted menus or dishes for the event. As described above in relation to the pop-up retail concept, early successes often lead to long term occupants.

**Entrepreneurial opportunity:** Business incubator could co-host a competition for local residents to develop a business plan and dining/drinking ‘experience’, then reward startup funding and support to the winners.

**Tie-ins:** Health, tourism.

**Potential Partnerships:** Existing restaurants at outskirts of town, local producers, Georgia Organics, Café Campesino, new restaurants or food producers.

## BIKE SHARE PROGRAM

Bike share programs benefit the economy, infrastructure, connectivity, and environments of the areas they serve. With both tourist and local users, bike shares can be strong revenue and job generators for municipalities and/or private sector ownership. There are a number of successful existing models of such programs, including member-supported and franchise (plug and play) varieties. Bikes connect existing infrastructure, take cars off the road, and relieve parking and congestion while offering a healthy transportation alternative, especially in temperate (and relatively flat) areas like Americus and Sumter County. In addition, a bike share program can provide additional branding and identity for a city, and boost tourism, like orange bikes in Amsterdam or the yellow bikes of Austin.



A few statistics from precedent programs in other cities:

- 43% of Denver B-Cycle users said they replaced car trips with bike rides
- More than 400 jobs are connected to Montreal's Bixi
- 96% of first-year users of Lyon, France's Velo'V had not ridden in Lyon before
- 23% of trips on Minneapolis' Nice Ride would have been by motor vehicle
- Bicycling increased 70% in Paris since Velib' was introduced in July 2007



**Tie-ins:** Health, tourism

**Potential Partnerships:** GSW, Phoebe Sumter and the local Hospital Authority, Health Insurance Companies, Food Co-ops, the Tourism Council

**Additional Resources:**

<http://www.bikesbelong.org/resources/stats-and-research/research/bike-sharing-in-the-united-states/>

<http://onforb.es/105vxgc>

<http://hpigreen.com/tag/bike-share-program/>

<http://ehextra.com/Main.asp?SectionID=12&SubSectionID=35&ArticleID=4623>

<http://www.theatlanticcities.com/commute/2013/02/if-you-build-bike-share-riders-will-come/4673/>

**Precedents:** [Denver B-Cycle, 2010](#); Montreal's [Bixi, 2010](#); Lyon's Velo'V [Holtzman, D., 2008](#); Minneapolis' Nice Ride [Nice Ride, 2010](#); Paris Velib' [Bremner, C., and Tourres, M., 2008](#).

**Branding precedent:** Austin's Yellow Bike Project <http://austinyellowbike.org/sp/about/>

**Funding examples:** <https://www.niceridemn.org/sponsors/> (GSW, Phoebe Sumter and the local Hospital Authority, Health Insurance Companies, Food Co-ops, the Tourism Council)

**Plug&Play/Franchise models:** <http://www.onbikeshare.com/>

**Member-supported bike share models:**

<https://www.niceridemn.org/?gclid=COze4YP4rLYCFQ3qnAodWIEAtg>

## CULTURAL EXPANSION

### EXPANDED FARMERS' MARKET PROGRAMMING/INCREASE IN SMALL-SCALE FARMING

There are strong links between farmers' markets and an area's economic development, community vibrancy, and sense of place. Encouraging citizens to eat seasonal and local food keeps money circulating in the local economy positively impacts residents' physical health and wellbeing, and reduces the environmental impact of food transportation. Expanded market programming creates jobs and business opportunities, and connects community members to their local farmers, their food sources, and to each other. A growing local market/demand would also ideally inspire and promote small-scale farming, which, if diversified, may be more economically sustainable than the current large scale monoculture model in which the majority of the output is shipped elsewhere and weather and disease can more easily wipe out an entire farm's harvest.



#### **Examples of programming that have found success elsewhere:**

**Retail/crafts:** Local artisans and students have the opportunity to test their business skills on a small scale, and gain an understanding of the local market/demand.

**Community education:** Cooking demos/instruction (precedent: Jamie Oliver food-at-work program—IDEO)

**Gardening demos/instruction:** Seed sharing, edible starter kits/compost for sale.

**Children's Activities:**

- Arts & Crafts (art teacher)
- Storytime (library)
- Seed Planting (garden club)
- Math at the Market (local or retired teacher)

#### **Access:**

For low- income families and seniors: Program participants should accept assistance payment methods (SNAP/food stamps, WIC, other retiree discount programs) and transportation support.

**Potential Partnerships:** Koinonia Farms, White Oak Pastures, other CSAs, Georgia Organics, area garden clubs, local bakeries and restaurants.

**Additional Resources:**

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailers/application-process.htm>

<http://www.ideo.com/foodrevolution/cookingandcompany>

[http://www.anrcom.msu.edu/anrcom/news/item/farmers\\_markets\\_are\\_important](http://www.anrcom.msu.edu/anrcom/news/item/farmers_markets_are_important)

*The Georgia Compass Program* provides tools for seniors through their aging services and an online application to apply for food stamps.

**COMMUNITY MARKET**

Growing out of an expanded farmers' market, a member-owned community grocery could provide numerous benefits to Americus. The creation of a locally-sourced, community-invested food market, which offers healthy and delicious prepared foods and a creative beer/wine selection and encourages on-site eating could serve as a gathering place, community activator, and education base. A good formula for a community node: provide good ingredients and encourage people to linger.

Member ownership disperses the risk and distributes wealth throughout the co-op population. Members have control over their food sources as well as investment in the physical and economic health of the community. The Americus co-op could source primarily from local farms and distributors, and continue to sponsor the weekly farmer's market in partnership with the same parties.

**Access:** For low- income citizens and seniors: Co-op participants should accept assistance payment methods (SNAP/food stamps, WIC, other retiree discount programs) and transportation support.

**Potential Partnerships:** Koinonia, farms andCSAs, Georgia Organics, local bakeries and restaurants

<http://www.koinoniapartners.org/index.html>

<http://www.cafecampesino.com/>

**Additional Resources:** Co-op resources: <http://www.cgin.coop/start-a-food-coop>

<http://www.sevananda.coop/about-2/cooperative-business-model/>

<http://nfca.coop/definition>

<http://viroquafood.coop/viroqua-food-coop-blog/bid/108908/The-Worker-Cooperative-A-Business-Model>

**FESTIVALS**

A large, annual festival based around a particular kind of music or art could do wonders for Americus's nationwide reputation as an arts-centered and activity-filled city with year-round entertainment options. One example of a community reaping benefits from a festival of this kind is Telluride, Colorado. Telluride is a well-known ski destination which has figured out a way to bring people in even when its primary industry is out of season. In the early days of the mining industry in Telluride, the miners hosted an annual Fourth of July celebration which grew and thrived even after there were no longer working

miners in the town. In 1979, a visionary organizer decided to change the format of the celebration and created the world's largest bluegrass music festival. Telluride is now synonymous with great music and has created a healthy tourist industry around that reputation despite that it's a very long trip from any major airport. Its live music venues are vibrant year-round, and the festival itself brings thousands of music lovers to the town every July.

Americus has the resources and infrastructure to eventually host a festival of similar scope and success. However, it would be unwise to immediately plan such a large undertaking. Instead, Americus should create its own version of the Telluride miners' Fourth of July Festival: quarterly festivals, each with a different theme, designed to accomplish the following goals:

- 1) Bring the community's various populations (college students, retirees, families, businesses) together downtown;
- 2) Introduce regional tourists to Americus;
- 3) Establish the organizational infrastructure necessary to host a larger, potentially nationally known festival.

*Scope:* Three annual arts events: a film festival at the Rylander Theatre, an arts festival in the streets of downtown featuring both local and regional artists and vendors, and a weekend-long music festival at various venues in town. These events need not be spread evenly across the calendar and should instead be centered on the time between March and October, preferably when Georgia Southwestern is in session. In order to ensure that each of the events caters as much as possible to each of Americus' populations, a planning council should be convened consisting of GSW students, city leaders, and community members of varying ages.

#### **FILM FESTIVAL**

The film festival will require the least effort but also has the lowest potential for bringing tourists into Americus. Instead, this event will have the primary goal of bringing together the citizens of Americus. Accordingly, films should be chosen on the basis of appeal to a broad age range or have subject matter related to an issue affecting Americus. Each year's films should have a common theme, and events should be planned around the films, such as discussions of the films by community members or lectures by the subjects of the films or individuals with some connection to the production of the movies.

#### **ARTS AND FOOD FESTIVAL**

A weekend-long street festival showcasing artists and food vendors from around the region has the potential for bringing tourists into Americus. Scheduling of this event should be coordinated to take advantage of national vendors who have made the trip to participate in similar events in Atlanta or Savannah. The festival should take place in a centralized, walkable location in downtown. If feasible, special invitation should be offered to and space reserved for GSW art students and for local food vendors.

## **MUSIC FESTIVAL**

A formal process should be initiated to determine a single genre of music which would be most attractive to the most diverse cross-section of the Americus population and a three-night music festival highlighting that genre should be designed. Americus natives have been successful in gospel, blues, country and rock music, not to mention those recent up-starts from Lee County. A small group of community leaders should convene to select three to five small music venues appropriate for hosting multiple concerts over the three-day span. Appropriate local, regional, and national acts should be chosen and recruited to participate. As the event grows, a larger, outdoor venue should be chosen for hosting the largest events of the weekend. Admission to the weekend's events could be free, per-show, or lump-sum depending on revenue analysis done by the planning group based on similar events around the country.

**Expected Outcome:** The city's goal for these three events, should be to find their strengths and weaknesses and then either combine them into one large arts weekend or pick one of the three events to expand in scope in order to become known on a statewide, regional, or national basis. At all times, an advisory board should take into account the interests of GSW students, city leaders, and the community at large. The existence of the larger festival should be utilized to enhance Americus's reputation as an attractive destination for retirees and to augment GSW's attractiveness to college applicants and graduates. To the extent possible, it should also be used to narrow the gaps between the community's different populations.

**Potential Partners:** City of Americus, Georgia Southwestern, Georgia Department of Economic Development, Georgia Council for the Arts

## **ADDITIONAL TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES**

Americus and Sumter County should promote community-based tourism for its cultural heritage (ANS, Carter, and Koinonia) and natural resources (Lake Blackshear and generally gorgeous weather). The Tourism Council, local government, and businesses should collaborate to provide tourism activities that are locally supported and sustainable.

This area of southwest Georgia hosts a wide variety of business and some have already seen value in collaboration. Downtown restaurants have SAM Shortline specials when the train comes to town. While the Windsor Hotel and Richelle's Bakery have wedding packages that they present at bridal fairs, other local businesses can partner with the Tourism Council when it presents at regional fairs, trade shows, and other marketing opportunities. Local entities can expand their influence by a concerted increase in connections to nearby Southwest Georgia events like Westville and Pasaquan, and festivals in other towns, such as Montezuma, Smithville, and Warwick.

The Chamber and Tourism Council already keep online calendars for many local events and festivals. These resources should include more information about GSW and SGTC events, like local sporting events, especially for Homecoming and Parent's weekends, and arts events. In turn, GSW should include more information on its site about local happenings so that parents and other interested parties are drawn to the area.

The Kiwanis Baseball Tournament, the Southeastern Electric Flight Festival at Hodges Hobbies, and The Ride Home with Rolling Thunder are weekend events that have created economic opportunity for local hotels and restaurants. Local government can help expand these opportunities and help promote return visits to the area. The Chamber and its business affiliates can partner with the Tourism Council to create sample itineraries or travel packages and market it to a variety of demographics such as parents of local college students, retirees, and those with special interests tied to the area's cultural heritage, like Civil War buffs and flight enthusiasts.

Americus has 299 total hotel rooms. In addition to a few chain hotels, Sumter County is home to some historic and award winning accommodations like the Windsor Hotel and Americus Garden Inn. On an average day, these accommodations are sufficient to meet the steady demand. However, larger events like The Ride Home force some participants to seek lodging in other towns or stay with hospitable residents. The creation of a race track north of Americus would place additional demand on existing lodging options. The City should set a goal of increasing the number of hotel and inn facilities in the county.

It would not be realistic to encourage another chain to build a facility without more frequent large-scale events requiring the space, but there is room for smaller, boutique hotels and B&Bs. The Plains Inn is an ideal retreat for those coming to the area for Sunday school with President Carter. The industry is heavily regulated by the county's fire and environmental health officials based on a myriad of local and state rules. These officials should seriously evaluate their locally promulgated provisions to determine how they may be driving entrepreneurs elsewhere in the region.

Additional Resources:

<http://www.whitecountychamber.org/business-resources-and-incentives>

<http://bit.ly/11oWD4G>

<http://cullin.org/cbt/index.cfm?section=chapter&number=1>

[http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$Department/deptdocs.nsf/all/csi13476/\\$FILE/Rural-Tourism.pdf](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$Department/deptdocs.nsf/all/csi13476/$FILE/Rural-Tourism.pdf)

<http://ced.uaa.alaska.edu/publications/manuals/FINALBBHandbook.pdf>

[www.pursellfarms.org](http://www.pursellfarms.org)

## CREATING A VOICE FOR THE DOWNTOWN REGION



The historic architecture of the building stock is evident to anyone visiting downtown Americus. What may not be as easily known is the history itself. In partnership with students of local universities and high schools, Downtown Americus should maintain a consistent social media presence striving to give a voice to the district and further enhancing the brand. Examples may include highlighting a historical event on a particular day or advertising upcoming events. The primary focus should be on cultivating a sense of place, and social media provides the greatest return and lowest capital requirement for highlighting such initiatives. The evolution of the City's social media efforts could be the creation of a mobile app serving as a tour guide for the building stock and areas of historical significance. Such an app would be a lower cost way to connect both residents and tourists to local history.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Creation of a career development center centrally located downtown in which high school students and adult residents can participate in courses and utilize services and resources provided through partnerships with the City of Americus, Georgia Southwestern State University, South Georgia Technical College, and Phoebe Sumter Medical Center.

### DOWNTOWN CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

The City should provide a downtown facility that offers career development training and services, such as GED/adult education classes, technology courses, job skills and job search support, bilingual education, and health issues. This could be an expansion of the variety of services offered locally at the Stein Center. Professionals from Georgia Southwestern, Phoebe-Sumter, and other interested entities can facilitate the training sessions and workshops.

**Potential Partners:** GSW, Phoebe Sumter, local educators

## ENTREPRENEUR TRAINING PROGRAM

Providing expert training and resources and access to prime downtown real estate will attract local entrepreneurs to start new businesses within downtown Americus and stimulate economic growth.

**Potential Partners:** Economic Development Entities, GSW, SGTC

**Example:** Georgia State University's Robinson College of Business hosts several workshops and training sessions for local entrepreneurs. The sessions are facilitated by faculty and students within the College at Georgia State and provide basic information on business plan creation, funding, and other aspects of business development. Providing a similar program will connect GSW and SGTC to the community and provide training that will encourage entrepreneurship and business creation in downtown Americus.

## SUMMER THEATER CAMP FOR YOUTH

The Rylander Theatre should consider providing unique summer learning experiences for high school students who are interested in theater arts. This youth camp could have two primary meeting locations, downtown at the Rylander Theatre and at Georgia Southwestern. This program would expand on the current opportunities available through the Missoula Children's Theatre and reinvigorate past programs like the Sumter Players' Jesters. Rylander Theatre staff and local college students would serve as the instructors and counselors for the camp. In addition, students would perform a theatrical piece at the end of the camp session for residents of the area. This activity would provide high school students with an extraordinary educational opportunity, memorable experiences, and direct interaction with college students. In addition, the youth camp would expose the youth and the residents of Americus to the Rylander Theatre, creating a new group of supporters and clientele.



## BIG IDEAS

### **TRANSIT EXPANSION**

Amping up the trolley system, a la Austin's 'Dillo or the Georgia Tech Trolley, to run routes between key tourist and commerce stops (hospital, GSW, airport, downtown) could boost tourism and provide needed transportation assistance to local citizens. In addition, it would be advantageous for local officials to monitor current state and national efforts for passenger rail service (including both high-speed and traditional passenger rail initiatives). While recent efforts face many challenges due to the failure to pass T-SPLOST legislation on a statewide basis and diminishing governmental funding, trends indicate the continued exploration of such ideas. The opportunity of many Southern towns lies in the abundance of rail lines and the existence of a network of right-of-way easements, which can be easily converted for passenger service. If such trends gain traction, Americus should consider efforts to become the Southwest Georgia hub, focusing on a direct linkage to Macon with a spoke system reaching out to other towns throughout the rest of the region.

### **COMMUNITY INVESTMENTS FROM ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS**

There is a strong link between anchor institutions and community wealth building. An economically vibrant and physically healthy community sustains these anchors, and vice versa; the relationship is symbiotic. These institutions play an enormous economic role in the city, for the sake of the community as well as self. Encouraging Georgia Southwestern Phoebe Sumter, and Georgia Power to capitalize on local investment would benefit their employees, the community, and their bottom lines.

Precedents include:

- One hospital's Community Investment Program began providing low-interest-rate loans to nonprofit organizations.
- A university earmarked 10 percent of its annual expenditures to purchasing locally.
- A healthcare system provided incentives to managers to hire locally and has set in place a policy to pay local vendors in advance to provide working capital.
- Another educational institution established an affordable housing loan fund to promote home ownership and community stabilization.
- One university provides capital or low-interest loan financing to community development financial institutions (CDFIs).

In addition, anchor investment has increased economic and community vitality in the following ways:

- Providing workforce training for people needing assistance in the community.
- Incubating the development of new businesses, including social enterprise among nonprofits.
- Serving as an advisor or network builder.

- Leveraging real estate development to promote local retail, employer-assisted housing, and community land trusts.
- Using pension and endowment funds to invest in local job creation strategies and to provide community venture capital for nonprofits, entrepreneurs, and employee-owned firms

Benefits to anchor institutions:

- Creation of a local environment that can attract personnel and customers.
- Strengthening the local economy and buying power.
- Generating support from community and political leaders.
- Contributing to institutional missions.
- Building support among internal stakeholders.

*Additional Resources:*

<http://community-wealth.org/strategies/panel/anchors/index.html>

[http://www.urbanportal.org/issues/entry/can\\_anchor\\_institutions\\_build\\_communities](http://www.urbanportal.org/issues/entry/can_anchor_institutions_build_communities)

<http://www.qih.org/general.cfm?ItemNumber=4342>

[http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Anchor\\_Paper\\_04\\_20\\_09\\_0.pdf](http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Anchor_Paper_04_20_09_0.pdf)

[www.huduser.org/portal/ipi/pdf/Berkeley\\_Report.pdf](http://www.huduser.org/portal/ipi/pdf/Berkeley_Report.pdf)

[http://austin.about.com/od/gettingaroundaustin/p/Dillo\\_Shuttle.htm](http://austin.about.com/od/gettingaroundaustin/p/Dillo_Shuttle.htm)

## **ADVANCED MANUFACTURING**

The City and County should explore a formal partnership with GSW and South GA Tech to evaluate 3-D printing as a viable enterprise and return of manufacturing for the region. The technology is still in its infancy without any region of the country dominating its early development. While many traditional manufacturing jobs explore international locations, many areas are seeing a re-emergence in manufacturing sectors, particularly in the advanced areas. The combination of local higher education institutions, existing building stock suitable for manufacturing, access to international trade through Cordele Intermodal Services and the Port of Savannah, and low business costs could expedite the region's entry into the advanced manufacturing sector.

*Potential Partners:* Georgia Institute of Technology, GSW, SGTC

*Example:* The partnership between Georgia Tech and Emory University in the bio/life sciences industry is now considered one of the preeminent programs in the country. As a result, the Atlanta region is seeing a significant economic expansion in the related fields as ideas exit this program and are commercialized.

## **GEORGIA'S HEALTHIEST COMMUNITY**

A healthy city is a wealthy city, both economically and socially, and a nationwide reputation for a healthy population would significantly boost Americus's attractiveness to young people and retirees.

There are significant impediments to Americus's earning the title of "The Healthiest City in Georgia," but promoting a productive, conscientious, and responsible citizenry will lower costs for all both now and in the future.



### CURRENT HEALTH CLIMATE

In a collaborative effort, the Sumter County Archway Executive Committee identified public health as a priority need in 2011. Discussions with the Sumter County Board of Health revealed that it had been over 20 years since a "needs assessment" had been conducted in the County. Thus, the community administered an assessment as a good starting point to gauge Sumter's public health needs. Interviews and focus groups were then conducted to get more in-depth information about the community's biggest health concerns. That assessment provides a lens to examine the City's goal of attracting young people, entrepreneurs, and retirees to Americus and Sumter County.

### RECENT ARCHWAY HEALTH ASSESSMENT REPORT TAKEAWAYS

Health issues facing Sumter County:

- Lack of access to healthcare and medication because patients do not have **transportation**
- **Lack of insurance** and a resulting **inability to afford healthcare services**
- Lack of support for **older adults and their caregivers**
- Limited county resources to treat **mental health**
- Residents not getting proper **nutrition**; inadequate parent education on children's nutritional needs

- Sumter County has the highest rate of **STDs** among middle/high school students in GA; lack of education and prevention resources
- **Illegal and prescription drug abuse**
- Improve **early childhood healthcare**
- Improve **prenatal counseling** and caregiver education

#### **MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES AS RANKED BY PARTICIPANTS**

1. Affordable/Adequate Health Insurance
2. Illegal Drug Use
3. Mental Health
4. Access to Health Education Resources (all health issues)
5. Alcohol Abuse
6. Access to Mental Healthcare Services
7. Access to Healthcare Services

In response to the number and range of concerning issues, community leaders and health stakeholders should take a strong stance to directly address the current health problems with solutions for access, education, and care to bring all citizens to an appropriate baseline of health from which they can thrive.

## HEALTH ACCESS/EDUCATION

### HEALTH EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP: FOSTERING COLLABORATION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS

In order to achieve a reputation as the healthiest city in Georgia, Americus, with the help of Sumter County, should require business, community, clergy, and education leaders to cast a collaborative vision of health for citizens. We envision a board of health experts that includes representatives from each of the aforementioned areas collaborating to provide the tools needed for community members to change their health. A few examples of the types of interactions that might result from the efforts of a health expert board are:

**Community Health Nights:** Schools would invite families for a heart healthy evening following a PTO meeting. Nurses would be available to check blood pressure, students from Georgia Southwestern would create learning experiences for the kids, other hospital personnel would discuss healthy heart eating, and healthcare experts would discuss the benefits of exercise.

Additional health fair topics could include: heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer, developmental disabilities, Alzheimer's and dementia, sexually transmitted diseases, drug education/rehabilitation, and obesity.

**Fair Representation:** The board should identify problems affecting the community, such as access to low cost health care/insurance, drug/alcohol abuse, or STDs, and man a booth at any fair/festival the town hosts with education materials.

**Collegiate Partnerships:** The board should identify areas of overlap between the hospital, businesses, and Georgia Southwestern where collaboration could improve the activity. For example, if the college is hosting an event on female safety on campus, the hospital could participate and discuss any supports it may have in place for college-age women.

The health board would meet approximately every two months and would aim to implement at least three collaborative events per year that open access to health literacies to various people.



**LOW COST/FREE HEALTHCARE OPTIONS**

As reported in the Archway assessment, a top health concern in Sumter County is access to affordable healthcare across the population. There are economic benefits for a healthy community and workforce, across all spectrums, but there are also significant documented savings to the County in providing alternatives to emergency room healthcare for those without adequate insurance or funds to pay for medical services. Due to federal laws preventing emergency rooms from turning patients away based on inability to pay, often the ER is the solitary care option available for those that are uninsured, and the financial burden is on the county. Support of a free or sliding scale payment model clinic, such as the one implemented by the new Sumter Faith Clinic, could reduce the cost burden on the community.

**Economic Benefits:** <http://bit.ly/17JxVB1>

Leveraging (and collaborating with) existing resources (low cost and sliding scale):

[http://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/Search\\_HCC.aspx](http://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/Search_HCC.aspx)

"Inadequate access to health care services" poses a considerable threat to public health and has significant national economic consequences." <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22516849>  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1646287/>

**Precedents:** GA:

Brunswick, GA: The Henri C. Woodman Free Clinics in Brunswick and St. Mary's provides access to free primary care for community members as part of the Coastal Medical Access Project (CMAP).

Gainesville, GA: The Good News Clinics in Gainesville offers free medical care to the indigent, homeless, and low-income people in Hall County, GA who have no health insurance and cannot afford medical care.

*Elsewhere:*

<http://www.ithacahealth.org/>

<http://my.clevelandclinic.org>

**Funding possibilities:** United Way, Dept. of Health & Human Services

**Additional Resources:**

<http://www.nafcclinics.org/resources>

<http://www.swghc.org/AUC.html>

<http://my.clevelandclinic.org/about-cleveland-clinic/overview/community/economic-impact-report.aspx>

<http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/Articles/2010/05/03/Free-Clinics-Lifeline-for-America.aspx>

<http://www.ithacahealth.org/>

<http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031210-101146>

[http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/770688\\_3](http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/770688_3)

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPECIALIZATION IN GERIATRIC CARE OR MENTAL HEALTH**

In order to enhance Americus's reputation as a health city and, in particular, as a destination for retirees, the City should partner closely with Phoebe Sumter, Magnolia Manor, Georgia Southwestern, the State Department of Health and Human Services, and any other relevant groups to perform a comprehensive analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the area's services aimed at retirement-age and elderly patients including treatment of Alzheimer's, dementia, arthritis, heart disease, depression, osteoporosis, Parkinson's, and eye diseases. An evaluation of the area's in-home care options, hospice services, and physical and occupational therapy services is also important.



The review and subsequent augmentation of the services available in the city and county would be comprehensive and would be specifically designed to increase the likelihood that Americus would be recognized by national organizations as an attractive retirement destination. It would include:

- An analysis of the services offered at Phoebe Sumter in the areas described above as compared to other similar hospitals that have been nationally recognized as ideal for retirees. This analysis would require significant involvement and leadership by the administration of Phoebe Sumter. The review would result in a set of specific recommendations which the hospital would undertake to enhance its services. If acceptable/beneficial to Phoebe Sumter, recommendations would be sought from the Emory University Wesley Woods Geriatric Hospital which has been nationally recognized for the quality of its geriatric care. In particular, a partnership might be encouraged between the two hospitals by which Wesley Woods Fellows might be placed at Phoebe Sumter for some period.
- A review of the quality of care provided at Magnolia Manor and other elderly care facilities in the area. This review would be performed by leadership at Magnolia Manor but would also involve, if appropriate, members of the Georgia Department of Health and Human Services and, if possible, representatives from an independent state or national organization with expertise in elderly care.

- Evaluation of the number and quality of private in-home care personnel currently working in Sumter County. This review would be carried out either by an independent, private body, the GA Department of Health and Human Services, or the UGA College of Public Health. Deficiencies in in-home services would be addressed in partnership with Georgia Southwestern in the form of courses of study designed to prepare graduates to care for the elderly.

The specific steps necessary to accomplish these goals are:

- 1) The City should convene a working group of administrators from each entity that might benefit from the enhancement of Americus's reputation as a destination for retirees.
- 2) This working group should meet semimonthly and:
  - a. Create and staff task forces to evaluate each of the factors described in the above section.
  - b. Identify possible funding sources for the envisioned work.
  - c. Set goals and deadlines for each task force.
  - d. Set a deadline for the completion of the work of each task force.
  - e. Design some kind of framework for how the recommendations of each task force will be acted upon.
- 3) As the work of the task forces proceeds, a separate group should design a marketing plan which will be used to sell the City of Americus to national groups that publish retiree destination rankings including the AARP, Yahoo!, and U.S. News and World Report. The goal of this group should be to have a standard information packet that can be sent nationwide to organizations with significant exposure to retirees. The marketing materials should include information about not only health care services available in the area but also recreation, housing, and entertainment options.

Possible funding opportunities/resources/partnerships:

- Georgia Departments of Public Health and Community Health
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Phoebe Sumter Hospital
- Arthur Blank Foundation
- Kaiser Permanente of Georgia
- Healthcare Georgia Foundation
- Georgia Health Foundation
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Council on Aging
- Georgia Cares (<http://www.mygeorgiacares.org/>)

## COMMUNITY FITNESS AND WELLNESS

### HEALTHY FOOD HUB

In regards to the connection between improved healthy food access and resulting economic and community development, the City should pursue an initiative to foster healthy food across the county which includes consideration of access, education, production, and food retail. There is a growing movement in the direction of healthy food hubs and their impact on local economies, as referenced in the resources below. Healthy food financing includes programs that amplify the spending power of low-income consumers and emulate skills-training and leadership programs.

*Sample 'Eat Local' Slogans:*

*"Eat from your (own) Backyard"*

*"Eat Where you Live"*

*"Deep Roots Americus"*



Models of healthy food retail on economic development: <http://bit.ly/Wjt5Fw>

#### **Key Takeaways:**

- *The movement toward local production, distribution, and consumption is creating a diverse array of new ways by which families are shopping for food*
- *Implications of the expansion of local food access for regional development patterns and transportation systems*
- *New trends in local and regional food systems impact of other models of healthy food retail on economic development*
- *Implications of the expansion of local food access for regional development patterns and transportation systems by parsing the important research questions triggered by the new trends in local and regional food systems*
- *Encouraging home growing/community gardens*

#### **Potential Partners:**

Georgia Organics

Phoebe Health

<http://www.koinoniapartners.org/index.html>

<http://www.cafecampesino.com/>

**Funding possibilities:**

[Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: Healthy Eating Research program](#)

**Additional Resources:**

[http://www.ucsusa.org/food\\_and\\_agriculture/solutions/expand-healthy-food-access/market-forces.html](http://www.ucsusa.org/food_and_agriculture/solutions/expand-healthy-food-access/market-forces.html)

**EXPANDED FITNESS AND RECREATION AMENITIES**

Americus would benefit greatly from a fitness initiative collaboration: a public-private partnership between existing fitness providers to identify gaps in fitness offerings and work together to provide complementary activities in a centralized community health center or YMCA facility. One potential location for such a facility is the former Piggly Wiggly building downtown; this could also serve well as an additional location of the Sumter County Parks and Recreation Department. The collaborative should seek grant support for leasing or purchasing the site and then refurbishing it with exercise rooms, fitness class venues, and, if possible, a pool. Input should be solicited from our target groups (young people, entrepreneurs, and retirees) in order to determine what types of classes would be most popular with these demographics...In addition, discounted memberships should be offered to retirees and students. To the extent possible, the indoor recreation location should be tied into the city's bike and running path network.

**PUBLICIZE EXISTING OUTDOOR ACTIVITY AMENITIES/PROGRAMS and CONSTRUCT NEW BIKE/HIKING TRAILS & ROUTES**

Sample branding/taglines capturing the message:

“So many scenic ways to get healthy”

“Get out there: beauty and history await”

While there are a number of available health programs and activities in the county, a first step to achieving any ‘healthiest’ moniker is awareness and recognition. Leveraging the proposed bike sharing program, existing trails and services should be highlighted and creatively promoted to capture the

offerings for a range of audiences (youth, retirees, students, athletes). This might include developing and packaging maps of routes and nearby facilities and attractions to distribute at college or high school fairs (and in GSW orientation materials), local retirement homes, and race expos. Travel packages could include hiking and bike routes or tours to scenic and historical attractions, such as Providence Canyon, Lake Blackshear, National Historic Sites in Plains and Andersonville, Pasaquan, the Rural Telephone Museum, Habitat Global Village and Discovery Center, and Koinonia Farms. Existing trails should be listed on state websites (see below). National organizations such as Rails to Trails and American Trails can assist with development and promotion of new trails to enhance the existing network. In addition, locals should support and participate in the annual Prison to Peanuts Bicycle Adventure, which is exactly the type of healthy attraction on which Americus should focus.

**Events/races highlighting routes:** Presidential Triathlon, Critical Mass, parades along routes (precedents include Atlanta Beltline lantern parade, Austin Bike parade)

**Fitness Tourism:** Example: Valentine's Day weekend package (bike tour around the lake, dinner, and night at the Windsor: 'We'll get your heart racing"); other themed bike tours highlighting history, architecture, local philanthropy, or agricultural sites.

**Entrepreneurial opportunity:** city and/or back road bike touring company (see above)



**Precedents:**

<http://www.backroads.com/trips/MSGI/south-carolina-georgia-biking-hiking-tour>

<http://www.biketoursatl.com/>

<http://www.portlandbicycletours.com/>

[www.bikethebigapple.com/](http://www.bikethebigapple.com/)

***Leveraging Existing Events/Facilities:***

<http://www.flatlandflyin.com/>

Lakeshore Marine

Prison to Peanuts Bicycle Adventure

***Additional resources:***

[www.americantrails.org/](http://www.americantrails.org/)

[www.railstotrails.org/](http://www.railstotrails.org/)

<http://www.gastateparks.org/ProvidenceCanyon>

<http://www.budgettravel.com/blog/new-trend-urban-bike-tours-in-los-angeles-and-new-york,11772>

## CONCLUSIONS

It is impossible to tell the story of Atlanta without discussing the importance of Hartsfield International Airport. The land began as the racetrack for the teenage son of the Candler family, of Coca Cola fame. With the advent of the airplane, the track was converted to a runway, just as every teenager wants for Christmas. Extremely forward-thinking for the time, the city of Atlanta signed a lease for the property a few years later, and this little racetrack grew to become the world's busiest airport. More importantly, it became the economic driver for Atlanta and remains a prominent piece in any economic development discussions. The story itself is a telling narrative of not just leveraging assets but of continuously investing and improving such assets. Even small streetscape projects can have dramatic impact on the walkability and resulting vibrancy of an area. The alleyways of downtown Macon have been revitalized and have led to an increased presence of people in that area. Americus is blessed with a remarkable downtown, but it must continue to improve this infrastructure, if only on a small scale. Could a vacant lot be converted into a small park or urban garden? Could a community clean-up campaign be organized with health initiatives to encourage citizens to be active while also giving back to the town?



It is crucial that the citizens of Americus play an integral part in the creation of any such initiatives. The goal of the Young Gamechangers is not to propose tremendously expensive or unrealistic ideas perceived to be a silver bullet for the downtown revitalization but instead to help foster incremental, organic change that can later be leveraged for big-picture projects. Americus should start small but have big vision. Encourage community involvement, listen to the populace, then give downtown Americus a voice to talk back. Create a conversation about the many wonderful things lining these historic streets, and the many possibilities for the future. Vibrant communities are not built on a single thing, but instead grow from a collection of diverse, symbiotic identities that collectively tell the story of a region.



## Group 3

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*What is Americus and Sumter County's unique story to the world? What is its niche that makes it different than other rural communities?*

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## BACKGROUND



Americus, Georgia in Sumter County shares many characteristics with other towns of the same size in the Southeastern United States. The decline of agriculture and manufacturing has taken a heavy toll on this community of 50,000 people and the community continues to struggle with economic development strategies. Despite their similarities with other rural communities, Americus and Sumter County are known for the distinctive organizations, people, and places that have had a substantial impact on America and the world.

Not only is Americus home to the historic Andersonville prison that was used as a confederate prisoner of war camp during the Civil War, but the area is also home to the 39th President of the United States - Jimmy Carter. Habitat for Humanity and the Fuller Center for Housing were born in this community. Charles Lindberg flew from Souther Field and Americus is home to the world's largest collection of telephones. The community has a rising healthcare industry and their downtown is a treasure chest of independently-owned restaurants and shops that are on the National Register of Historic Places.

The area's rich history tells a story of past success and the community now has the opportunity to tell the story of its bright future.

This proposal attempts to weave together the community's unique stories to produce a cohesive message from Americus and Sumter County to the world.



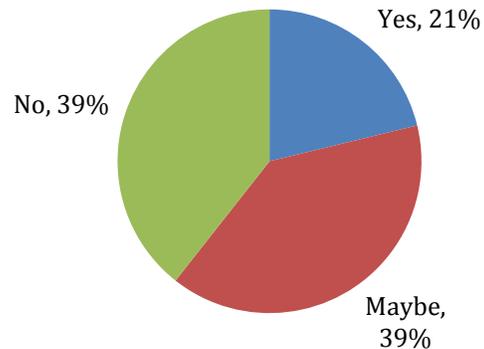
Yet despite its many assets, the community is faced with challenges that threaten its potential for success in the future. When asked about the issues facing Americus and Sumter County, respondents indicated that the K-12 education system and race relations present the most significant challenges to the community at this time. Survey results indicated that there are no major areas where citizens are united.

**Statistics and Data**

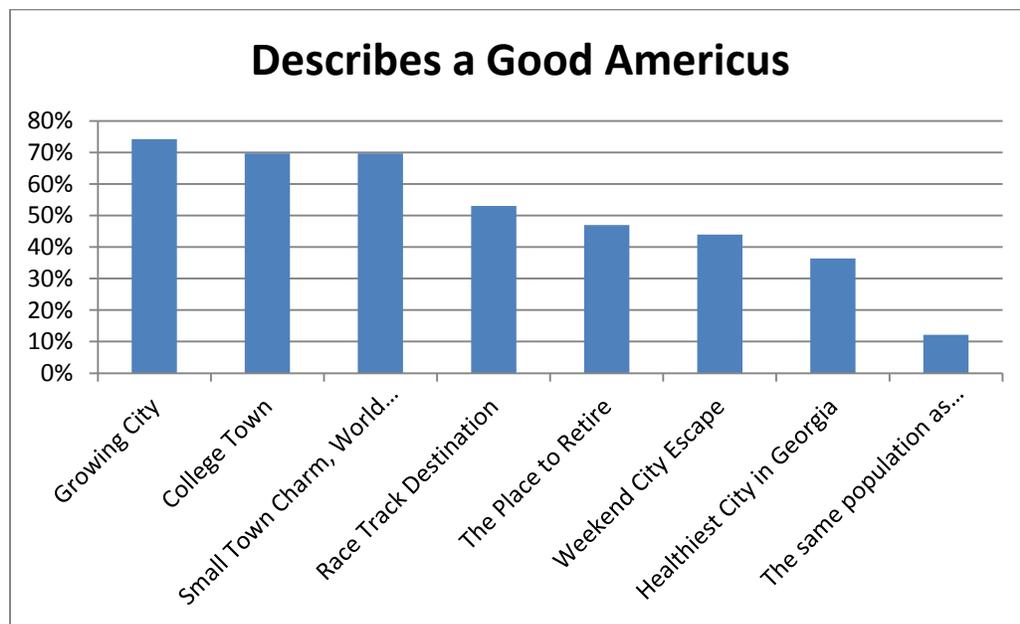
To generate public input, we surveyed 68 residents of Americus and Sumter County. The results of this survey were insightful as they set out the community’s opinions regarding the present and future prospects of Americus and Sumter County.

To gauge to confidence of the area and its current story, the first question asked was, “Do you believe Americus and Sumter County are headed in the right direction?”. Responses to the question were mixed (See graph inset).

**Do you believe the City of Americus and Sumter County are headed in the right direction?**



In order to determine what community residents felt about the story of Americus and Sumter County, respondents were asked what words they think describe a good Americus (See graph below).



## Summary of Findings

Responses gathered from the initial survey reflect the multiplicity of stories and areas of focus in Americus and Sumter County. While a larger number of responses could offer more information, it is unlikely that the information would result in a single, unified vision for the community.

## SWOT Analysis

Qualitative data collected from surveys provided input on the diversity of the challenges and stories Americus holds.<sup>13</sup>

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diverse selection of positive stories</li> <li>• Small &amp; historic Feel</li> <li>• Public awareness of nearby attractions and community icons</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too much story to pick from</li> <li>• Low awareness of certain attractions</li> <li>• Not attractive for young professionals: school systems, vacancies in downtown</li> <li>• Hours of operation</li> <li>• Anti-college stigma</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverage community Strengths to tell story</li> <li>• Collaborate with local colleges</li> <li>• Adjust rules to promote activities and events</li> <li>• Improve attitudes on race and public school issues</li> <li>• Increase hours of operation</li> <li>• Check survey feedback for specific ideas: parks, crime areas, solar, cycling, etc.</li> <li>• Increase family activities</li> <li>• Retrain manufacturing labor</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative word of mouth and public silence</li> <li>• Neighboring cities and school systems</li> <li>• Tough economy</li> <li>• Discord between growth and small town values</li> <li>• Impression of rising crime and increasing socio-economical divide</li> </ul>

Expressed community strengths ranged from the incredible variety of options for community participation, to the small town, historic feel of the community. In general, expressed strengths focused on the diversity of offerings, issues related to living in a small community (no traffic, safe, strong community groups) as well as the benefit of having other nearby attractions so close (Jimmy Carter National Historic Site, Georgia Veterans State Park, Andersonville Civil War Village and National Historic Site, Rylander Theatre, and Windsor Hotel).

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<sup>13</sup> Complete survey results are included in Appendix 1 which is available by contacting [amir@georgiaforward.org](mailto:amir@georgiaforward.org) or 404-658-5919.

Survey participants also identified areas of concern in their community that they would like addressed. Challenges focused on; young professionals (“town is not college friendly”), historic community issues (race relations and the resulting school system discord / continued racial stress and divides, city and county not working together) and the economic development challenges (city shuts down on weekends, irregular hours of shops, local workers unwilling to be retrained).

Among the variety answers to the question of what opportunities are available, community assets were often identified as starting points that could be leveraged into further opportunities (Nursing Program, Tourism Opportunities, and Solar Energy). The opportunity to appeal to young professionals was noted, not in terms of creating social settings but in terms of attracting young professionals looking for improved quality of life and social service opportunities. Mentoring programs could attract young professionals and entrepreneurs alike.

Residents commented that all the diverse community strengths were opportunities to tell the story of Americus. This section of the report concurs with that finding, and the strength of the Americus story lies in the broad base it provides to leverage many stories into many opportunities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Americus and Sumter County are like many other small towns in Georgia and across the United States. However, finding the niche that sets Americus apart from others who may boast the same small town “charm” living is not difficult to do. By building upon the foundation already established and touting their assets, Americus can realize economic success in addition to creating a more perfect place to live and work. These recommendations are not meant to be absolute and are only a glimpse at possible stories to the world.

### **Americus’s Narrative**

**Americus and Sumter County are not just one story. They are many stories woven together to become the narrative that forms this community’s unique story to the world.**

**Small Town, Changing the World**

**Healthcare Assets, Medical Sciences  
Hub**

## Small Town, Changing the World

### *What is this story?*

Americus is home to non-profit organizations, businesses and people that have transformed the lives of people around the world. Few other cities can claim the mix of small town charm and global impact that Americus and Sumter County have. Americus and Sumter County are well positioned to build on this legacy by being a hub for social entrepreneurship and providing support to game changing startups in the future.



### *Why does this story need to be told?*

Americus has a demonstrated history of supporting non-profit organizations and businesses that have had significant impact on our world. Three such organizations, Habitat for Humanity, The Fuller Center for Housing and Café Campesino have built global networks from their home in Americus, Georgia.

Habitat for Humanity International was founded in Americus in 1976 by Linda and Millard Fuller. Through the work of this organization, thousands of volunteers have come together to successfully tackle a significant social problem—decent housing for all. Today, Habitat has helped build or repair more than 600,000 houses and served more than 3 million people around the world.

Almost 20 years after the founding of Habitat for Humanity International, The Fullers founded The Fuller Center for Housing, a non-profit, ecumenical Christian housing ministry dedicated to eliminating poverty housing worldwide. By forming partnerships with local organizations, The Fuller Center provides the structure, guidance and support that communities need to build and repair homes for the impoverished among them.

Café Campesino, the United States' first and only fair trade, organic purchasing cooperative for green coffee beans, was founded in Americus. Café Campesino's role is to establish long-term relationships with farmer cooperatives, buying and importing their green coffee,



paying them a fair wage, and selling it to roasters in the U.S. who care about the people behind the coffee.

Yet, it is not just organizations and businesses that have put Americus and Sumter County on the global map. Residents have been changing the world since the community was formed. The area is home to former president Jimmy Carter and a host of other prominent politicians including former United States Attorney General, Griffin Bell. Numerous professional athletes and coaches have built careers on the experience they gained in the community. Charles Lindbergh literally launched his career in Americus when he took off on his first solo flight from Souther Field in 1923.

The success of these organizations, businesses and individuals has uniquely established Americus as a small town where new ideas and people make a big difference. By assisting others in the development and implementation of their original ventures, Americus has the opportunity to distinguish itself as a leader in social entrepreneurship and innovative new business development.

***Resources to help tell this story:***

In order to attract non-profit organizations and businesses to launch and/or locate in Americus and Sumter County, the community will need to provide the resources necessary for their success. In addition to providing access to financial and administrative assets, Americus and Sumter County have the opportunity to establish a mentor program where emerging entrepreneurs can learn from experienced professionals whose ideas have had an impact on a global scale.

The following sources could be consulted in researching funding for marketing Americus and Sumter County as a non-profit and start-up business incubator:

- National Business Incubation Association <http://www.nbia.org/index.php>
- Georgia Department of Economic Development <http://www.georgia.org/business-resources/Pages/business-incubator.aspx>
- Resources for financial assistance in Georgia <http://www.georgia.org/competitive-advantages/Pages/financial-assistance.aspx>
- [Georgia Center for Non-Profits](#)
- [Mattie H. Marshall Foundation](#)
- [Woodruff Foundation](#)

## **Healthcare Assets, Medical Sciences Hub**

### ***What is this story?***

Americus is home to a new state of the art hospital facility that offers patients the most advanced equipment and technology available. The community is also training the healthcare professionals of tomorrow and contributing to solutions that address the nation's need to improve the healthcare system as a whole but especially in rural Georgia. Americus and Sumter County can lead the way to a brighter and healthier future for all of rural Georgia and attract national businesses, healthcare professionals, and industry leaders in innovation and research in the medical fields.

### ***Why does this story need to be told?***

The unique opportunities that exist in Americus and Sumter County with regard to a budding healthcare industry abound; ready and able students at respectable institutions, a state of the art hospital situated perfectly in the heart of rural Georgia, and immediate care needs of an aging population and hopefully an expanding population in the future.



Americus houses two large higher learning institutions, Georgia Southwestern State University and South Georgia Technical College. Both institutions can help form a rural hub for the medical sciences, pharmaceutical research, and the vocational training of future nurses and doctors. These institutions provide a backbone for a healthy triangle within southwest Georgia connecting Mercer University's School of Medicine with campuses in Savannah, Columbus and Macon. Students could gain hands-on, practical experience while caring for the population and businesses will aim to locate the next cutting edge medical breakthrough with willing hands at the helm.

Not only is the environment ripe for training the professionals of tomorrow and fostering ideas to address the needs of our ever changing and aging population, but the environment is primed for investment from the private sector. Universities are incubators for ideas and research. Americus could be the final point of a research triangle that Georgia has sought to gain in the health industry. Georgia has successfully wooed large pharmaceutical and medical companies in recent years to



locate their research and manufacturing facilities within its borders and the time is now to harness the excitement and distinguish Americus as a location with the built in assets that a company looks for when locating.

***Resources to help tell this story:***

The following sources could be consulted to help tell this story:

- A strategic partnership should be forged between the business community and university community as well as the hospitals.
- Open communication and a plan for integrating university teachings with businesses needs that will be recruited as well as the needs of the hospital to ensure the best and the brightest students and businesses attend will be crucial.
- Creating a competitive edge and ensuring the city can provide the standard of living for these young and old professionals will be a large part of the process.
- A business friendly environment is needed. One of tax credits, and assurance of a skilled workforce.
- Leadership is CRITICAL, a shared vision is the key to success.



## OTHER IDEAS FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

Americus and Sumter County boast a number of unique assets that could be leveraged to advance regional and community development. While the recommendations in this report are focused specifically on business development and healthcare, the following ideas may warrant further research by leaders of Americus and Sumter County in the future.

### **Economic Development through Creative Placemaking**

Sumter County has a rich diversity of cultural resources – from charming downtowns and world-class historic sites to local foods and national touring performances, that’s why the city of Americus is the perfect destination for visitors of all ages.

The tourism industry in Georgia is the 5th largest employer in the state with a total economic impact of \$49 billion, supporting more than 400,000 jobs, or 10.3% of all payroll employment in Georgia. Americus and Sumter County are home to a diverse portfolio of cultural resources which make them a perfect destination for heritage tourism. The City of Americus is a beautifully preserved nineteenth-century downtown that bears witness to the significant role the city played in the cotton trade of the period. Its centerpiece is the magnificent Windsor Hotel, a five story Victorian building that opened in 1892.

Sumter County boasts two nationally significant attractions – the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and the Andersonville National Historic Site. It is home, also, to the airfield where Charles Lindbergh made his first solo flight.

Yet, Sumter County has a story to tell that’s not just about buildings and the past. It’s about people and the future. Americus is now home to Thirteenth Colony Distilleries, the only craft distillery in the state of Georgia. The city also boasts a thriving performing arts community at the beautifully restored Rylander Theatre that attracts national and international performers to its stage. With such a rich diversity of cultural resources, Sumter County is well-positioned to attract visitors from across the state and throughout the region.

The following could be considered as both funding sources and conversation partners moving forward:

#### ArtPlace

<http://www.artplaceamerica.org/about/>

ArtPlace is a joint effort of national funders working to accelerate creative placemaking initiatives through grants and loans, engaging in well-grounded and imaginative research and implementation efforts.

### Georgia Council for the Arts

<http://www.gaarts.org>

The Georgia Council for the Arts is the State Arts Agency, and has recently developed a tourism development program that would be of particular interest in this effort (<http://www.georgia.org/industries/Tourism/Pages/tourism-grants.aspx>). The Georgia Council for the Arts is also part of a larger economic development effort - which sends groups of trained professionals to analyze the assets of a community that include all aspects of a community from economic development through arts and culture. This appears to be a free state-run program, but requires being added to a waiting list for participation.

### Georgia Humanities Council

<http://www.georgiahumanities.org>

Though the work of the Georgia Humanities Council in funding primarily supports educational programming, they will be important conversation partners while creating an inventory of cultural assets in the region.

### Kresge Foundation

<http://www.kresge.org/programs/arts-culture>

The Kresge Foundation has taken a leadership role in funding creative placemaking and community revitalization utilizing Arts and Culture programming.

### National Endowment for the Arts

<http://www.nea.gov/grants/apply/index.html>

The National Endowment for the Arts, the national arts organization, may be both an important conversation partner as well as a possible financial supporter. The first potential partnership to explore would like be the Our Town initiative:

### SouthArts

[http://www.southarts.org/site/c.gulYLaMRJxE/b.1144807/k.F162/South\\_Arts\\_Building\\_a\\_better\\_South\\_through\\_the\\_Arts.htm](http://www.southarts.org/site/c.gulYLaMRJxE/b.1144807/k.F162/South_Arts_Building_a_better_South_through_the_Arts.htm)

SouthArts, based in Georgia, is one of 6 organizations across the country that administers programs and funding for the NEA. Both as a funding source, and as a conversation partner, SouthArts can be a valuable partner. SouthArts has professional research staff exploring economic impact and arts and culture in the South. They will have the best resources possible for examples of communities who have managed to leverage arts and culture for dramatic economic impact effects.

### Swamp Gravy

<http://swampgravy.com>

Colquitt County has written and performed their community folk-life through a now nationally known play *Swamp Gravy*. While developing a plan on how to tell the community story in Americus, it would be helpful to be in communication with those who have already learned how to discover and then communicate their story well.

### Tomlinson-Graham Group

<http://tomlinson-graham.com/index.html>

Based in Georgia, Tomlinson-Graham Group help develop civic cultural plans in order to revitalize community. They are nationally recognized experts in determining community needs, inventory, and potential impact.

## **Environmental Solutions for a Greener Economy**

Americus has a well-documented history of participating in cutting-edge environmental programs that have national impact. Historically the longleaf pine forests covered about 92 million acres in the Southeast United States. Currently less than 3% of that original habitat exists, with a further loss of almost 100,000 acres per year.

USDA Forest Service launched an innovative research project to help the Department of Defense better manage longleaf pine forests on military bases for absorbing climate-changing carbon dioxide. One of three states chosen to participate, Georgia and Sumter County are leading the region on this important issue. Researchers say the study is the largest carbon sequestration assessment of longleaf pine ecosystems conducted on southern military bases.

The Conservation Reserve program was created to restore available agricultural areas that fell within the historic boundaries of longleaf pine ecosystems to their original states. This work is being done with similar research by the US Department of Defense in conjunction with SRS, Auburn University and the University of Florida to manage longleaf pine ecosystems on military bases.

Americus has a history of partnering on environmentally responsible projects. Research has shown that the longleaf pine has a high potential to sequester carbon and provides unique benefits to the wildlife and vegetation ecosystems that co-exist with it. The longleaf pine also has additional value in providing high-return wood products and pine straw production. Participation in this environmental program has resulted in potential new economic drivers.

By participating in multiple initiatives, Americus could easily develop a national reputation as a rural community that is taking a leadership role in environmental responsibility. By cross-marketing this with the history of non-profit development, social entrepreneurs could be attracted to new developments in the community.

Participation in this program and its success can pave the way for community support in bringing new and innovative green development to Americus. Building upon both the story of the longleaf pine, as well as marketing around other social responsibility efforts offers a unique story about a small town making environmental choices with a positive economic impact.

In order to take a leading role in generating interest and development in green technology and initiatives, it is recommended that the following green areas be explored:

### Longleaf Pine Reforestation

Potential in this area includes specific marketing of the longleaf pine wood products as being a green choice and a local/Georgia product. An education campaign around the environmental benefits of carbon sequestration could increase adoption of the program as well as the development of in-town/residential participation in the program.

### Solar Power

Research has shown Georgia to be tied in 10<sup>th</sup> in terms of states with a potential for generating solar power. As the cost of solar power continues to decrease (7% per year since 1980 in the cost per watt of solar cells) the cost of coal and electricity continues to rise. Increased supply of solar power in an area also means that wholesale price during peak usage hours is reduced for high-energy users such as industry, farmers and project developers. Recommendations are to explore options in converting low-yield or low-return cotton farmland into solar farms for those interested in participating.

### Biomass

Over half of Sumter County has EMCs supplied by Oglethorpe Power Company. In 2008 the OPC announced plans to build three 100 megawatt biomass generating facilities in Georgia. The power plants will provide power to the 38 member cooperatives that supply almost half of Georgia with Power. Aside from the positive environmental choice of using renewable energy, a biomass plant located near Americus would generate more than 40 new full-time higher income jobs, as well as supporting a robust forestry industry.

### Pedaling Their Way to a Brighter Future

In Minas Gerais, Brazil, prisoners are able to reduce their prison sentence by riding stationary bikes that generate electricity used to power street lights.

As recreation time in Georgia correction facilities continues to be cut in order to save money, prisoners find themselves without the opportunity to adequately exercise. Studies show this creates a double burden financially, as prisoner health care costs rise considerably.

Generating electricity through stationary bikes could be a unique environmental response to a budget challenge, allowing prisoners to gain exposure to much needed exercise time while at the same time contributing to the community at large. A program such as this could easily generate positive national and international attention and further boost Americus' reputation as a green leader that is a leader in social entrepreneurship.

The following sources could be consulted in researching funding for marketing Americus as a green community:

- Southface <http://www.southface.org>
- US Department of Energy <http://www.eere.energy.gov>
- US Energy Information Administration <http://www.eia.gov>
- Southeastern Energy Society <http://www.seesorg.org>

- Georgia Environmental Finance Authority <http://www.gefa.org>
- American Solar Energy Society <http://www.ases.org>

### **Alternative Crops**

Peanuts and cotton are the bulk of the agriculture in this area, but what about hops to be used in a local organic Microbrewery/Brew Pub? Several people throughout the community are brewing their own beer. Since a proper “bar” is not the most popular idea amongst local legislators, a Brew Pub—which would provide food as 2/3 of its business—would move Americus one step closer to being a “college town” and at the same time satisfy a more mature sector of the community as well. A portion of the beer sales could be used as a subsidy to the local farmers growing the hops.

### **Focus on Farm-to-Table**

Koinonia Farms and Lenny’s Market—local farmer’s market—should be supplying local restaurants. Surrounded by farm land on all sides, locally grown produce belongs at tables in Americus homes and eateries. The economic impact goes directly to the local farmers and restaurant owners have more direct access to the product. This movement requires very little policy implementation and it could be encouraged through a simple public proclamation by the Mayor.



# Young Gamechangers Class of 2013

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**Ben Andrews** is a young professional working in community and economic development in South Georgia. He is a 2011 Graduate from the Georgia Academy for Economic Development, and is currently working as the Community Development Coordinator for the City of Americus, Georgia. Outside of work Ben is very active in his community. He serves as the Vice President for the Board of Directors for the local Habitat for Humanity affiliate, New Horizons, and is the program manager for the Americus Rotary Club. He has also been involved with community projects such as the “Bridging Campus and Community” initiative, as well as working with groups such as the recreation department, and the Boy Scouts of America. Ben is a Graduate of The Georgia Institute of Technology, with a degree in Business Management, and concentrations in Finance and Marketing, and he has a Masters of Business Administration from Georgia Southwestern State University.



**Justin R. Arnold** was born in Americus, Georgia. He attended Southland Academy and was an Eagle Scout in Troop 21. He graduated *cum laude* with honors in Political Science from Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi. Justin pursued his law degree at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, where he received the Walker P. Johnson, Jr. Memorial Award which recognizes “a graduating senior who has demonstrated excellence in litigation skills and a keen sense of professionalism and ethics.”

Upon completing his legal education, Justin came back to Americus and joined a local law firm. He currently serves as an Assistant District Attorney for the Southwestern Judicial Circuit. At present, he is the president of Americus Literacy Action, Inc. and is also a member of the Americus Rotary Club, the Sumter Historic Trust, and First United Methodist Church. Justin and his wife, Rachel, have one daughter.



**Emily Boness** is originally from Anchorage, Alaska, but has lived in Georgia since 2004. She moved to Atlanta to work in operations management after graduating from Brown University with a degree in political science. In 2010, Emily graduated from the University of Georgia School of Law and joined The Fanning Institute at UGA as a Public Service Assistant. She works in communities around Georgia, including Americus, to help move the community forward. Emily also designed and implemented Athens Peer Court, a diversion program that trains local high school students to be the advocates, judges and jurors in disposition hearings for youth arrested of first time offenses. In her free time, Emily likes to play soccer, tennis and do pottery. She is a mentor and meets with her mentee to swim or review homework, and she is also a board member for Youth Leadership Athens and Children's First.



**Gregory Burbidge** is a Senior Program Specialist at the Atlanta Regional Commission, working at building a program around the ARC board vision of coordinating a regional focus on arts and culture planning. In 2012 the ARC absorbed the work of Metro Atlanta Arts & Culture Coalition in a planned strategic partnership. Greg served as the Research & Operations Manager for MAACC, an organization dedicated to education, awareness and advocacy for arts and culture issues in the Metro Atlanta Region. Born in the wilds of northern Canada, Gregory spent his early professional life working as a gold miner.

Gregory also spends time steering the ship for the Emerging Arts Leaders of Atlanta program. In the last two years the program has created over 100 mentor opportunities, facilitated monthly speaker events, and hosted successful annual Creative Conversations events. In his free time, Greg found an artistic outlet as a textile artist, successfully weaving together interests in mathematics, shepherding, and wearable art.



A lifelong Georgian, **James Carter** is a recent graduate of the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University. With a specialty in public budgeting and finance, James has worked for the Panamanian government as an independent consultant for the Ministry of Social Development, and as a budget analyst for Georgia State Senator Jason Carter, where he had the opportunity to work on the recent HOPE Scholarship legislation for the Democratic Caucus. Currently, James is an independent political researcher whose work is frequently featured on popular news websites, and operates a highly-trafficked YouTube channel dedicated to current and archival political footage. This past March, he was the subject of an article for PBS' *Need to Know*.



**Janet Cummings** is an Assistant Professor of Health Policy and Management at the Emory University Rollins School of Public Health. She received her Ph.D. in Health Services with a concentration in Economics from the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health. Dr. Cummings' work examines issues concerning access to and quality of mental health services, with a particular emphasis on socioeconomic, geographic, and racial/ethnic disparities among youth. She has received numerous awards for her work including the Chancellor's Service Award from UCLA and a national award for her doctoral dissertation from AcademyHealth. Dr. Cummings recently received a five-year career development award (K01) from the National Institute of Mental Health to study children's mental health services in the public safety net.



**Jefferson Irwin Davis IV** graduated from Dublin High School in 1993 and from The University of Georgia in 1998. He began his career in Information Technology in 1998 with Columbia/HCA, and went on to found Alterra Networks in 2005. Based in Dublin with 15 full time employees, Alterra Networks competes statewide in the Low Voltage and Network Infrastructure arenas. When the home office was outgrown, Jeff acquired Downtown Dublin's "Old" Post Office, built in 1912. Using original blueprints and 1,500 pages of documentation from the National Archives, Jeff and his team restored the building to its original grandeur. His other passions are forestry and cattle farming. Jeff is married to the former Jennifer Wynn of Rockledge. They have three children; sons Jeff (4), and Morgan (3), and daughter Mollie (8 months).



**Nicole de Vries**, 31, currently serves as the manager of academic data at her alma mater, Columbus State University. Working in the university's Office of Academic Affairs, Nicole oversees a myriad of technical applications and databases that are critical to the how the university operates and serves its students.

Named as one of the "Top 5 Under 40" by *Columbus and the Valley Magazine* in 2011, Nicole is building her reputation as an emerging community leader on a record of superior scholastic achievement and extensive community service.

She has two degrees from Columbus State University, a bachelor's in Computer Information Systems Management (2007) and a Masters of Business Administration that she earned in 2009. While an undergraduate at CSU, she served as president of the Student Government Association and, earned the Charles Eason Leadership Award and was awarded the 2007 Faculty Cup, the highest academic award the faculty can bestow on a student.

*Young Gamechangers 2013 Final Project*

**Chantee Earl** is a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Department of Middle/Secondary Education and Instructional Technology at Georgia State University. She received her Ph.D. in Education from the University of Pittsburgh. Dr. Earl's research focus and instruction centers on urban social studies teacher education, historical thinking, culturally relevant pedagogy, multicultural education, and critical race studies in education. A former high school social studies teacher, Chantee Earl has over seven years of classroom teaching experience. She currently instructs and coordinates the social studies M.A.T. program at Georgia State. She has presented at national educational research conferences and has produced scholarly research articles related to social studies and urban education and is committed to improving the educational experiences for all students.

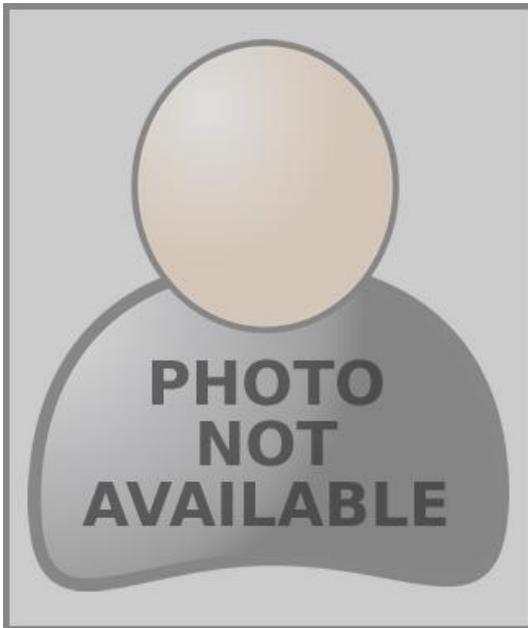
Chantee Earl also serves the greater Atlanta community as coordinator of the Edgewood Court Apartments summer tutoring and enrichment program located in the Edgewood community and works as a church musician at Great Smith Chapel A.M.E. Church. Chantee Earl also competes professionally in the 800 meters and has represented the United States in various national and international track and field competitions.



**Howard Franklin** is one of the South's most sought-after political strategists. He has distinguished himself by running successful campaigns for young candidates, including State Senator Jason Carter and Councilmember Kwanza Hall. Howard has played leading roles in major policy decisions, helping Atlanta City Council win approval of a pension reform and persuading Georgia's largest counties to include foreclosures in property assessments. He founded Firehouse Phones in 2008, which quickly grew into the region's "go-to" firm for democrats, leading 200+ telephone campaigns in 12 states. In 2011, he launched Georgia10x10.com, delivering the top 10 political stories to 4000 lawmakers and lobbyists by 10 a.m. daily. Howard was elected first male president of the Georgia League of Women Voters and first chairman of the Democratic Party's African-American Caucus. He earned degrees in English and sociology from Morehouse College.



**Denise R. Grabowski**, AICP, LEED AP, is the founder of Symbioscity, an urban planning firm dedicated to fostering mutually beneficial relationships between people, place and planet. Denise has worked as a senior-level planner for local governments and as a consultant for the public and private sectors. A frequent public speaker, she has presented at national and regional conferences on quality growth and sustainable development, including the American Planning Association and the National League of Cities. She is a founding member of the U.S. Green Building Council-Georgia, and co-founder of Designing4Health, a non-profit working to increase the understanding between community design and public health. Denise has a B.S. in Environmental Science from Furman University, a Master of City Planning from Georgia Tech, and is a graduate of the Institute for Georgia Environmental Leadership (IGEL). In 2009, she was named to *Georgia Trend's* "Top 40 Under 40: Georgia's Best and Brightest" list.



**Hillard Hardin**



**Kris Hattaway** is proud to be from Macon, Georgia. She is a 2008 graduate of the University of Georgia where she received her Bachelor of Arts in Journalism with an advertising concentration and was a part of the LEAD program through the Terry College of Business's Institute for Leadership Advancement. After graduation, Kris moved back to her hometown with the intention of making a difference. She has been serving as Director of Place at NewTown Macon, a nonprofit working to revitalize downtown Macon, for the past three and half years. Kris is responsible for marketing and promotions for NewTown Macon and is involved in the organization's overall economic development projects. She is very active in several organizations in Macon including the Macon Rotary Club and the Junior League of Macon. In her free time she enjoys traveling, going to country music concerts and entertaining friends and family.



**Georgia Wood Hodges** works as an assistant research scientist at the University of Georgia. She attended public schools in the state of Georgia and committed her professional life to improving the educational system found in the US. After working in the public schools in Georgia, she returned to UGA where she ultimately completed her PhD to help further her commitment to improving educational outcomes for all students. Her current research focuses on rural science teacher retention, attrition, and migration as well as the development of novel instructional tools to teach students fundamental biological processes that affect type 2 diabetes and obesity, issues of utmost importance to Georgians.



**Bardin Hooks** was born and raised in Americus, Georgia, where his family has lived for seven generations. He attended The University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, and was a member of the varsity golf team, Kappa Alpha Order, and studied abroad at St. John's College, Oxford University. In 2003, Bardin received a degree in History from Sewanee, with a minor in Political Science. He then spent a year clerking for the law firm of King & Spalding in Atlanta before enrolling at Mercer University's Walter F. Georgia School of Law in Macon. After graduating and being admitted to the bar, Bardin was appointed as an Assistant Attorney General for the State of Georgia and primarily represented executive branch agencies in hearings before the State Board of Workers' Compensation. In 2011, Bardin moved back home to Americus and joined the law firm of Gatewood, Skipper & Rambo as an associate attorney.



**Tyler Mann** grew up in Roswell and graduated from Roswell High School. He left Georgia to attend Yale University, where he double majored in biomedical engineering and political science, and the University of Michigan Law School. Tyler then returned to Atlanta and practiced for six years in the Regulatory Compliance and Governmental Litigation practice group at Troutman Sanders. There, he specialized in policy litigation, legislative and municipal counsel, and land use and zoning. Tyler recently left Troutman to dedicate his career to public service. He and his wife, Lindsey, live in Atlanta with their eight-month-old twins.



**Carmie McDonald** serves as Program Manager for the Fox Theatre Institute (FTI), an outreach division of Atlanta’s Fox Theatre. FTI provides support for Georgia’s historic theatres through educational and professional development programs including Georgia Presenters, a statewide booking consortium that encourages collaboration among arts presenters. Carmie’s most recent project for FTI is the development of *The Georgia Historic Preservation Handbook*. This forthcoming publication will provide an overview of the theory and practice of historic preservation in the state.

Prior to joining FTI, Carmie worked for Historic Savannah Foundation in Savannah, Georgia where she coordinated the publication of *Historic Savannah: A Survey of Significant Buildings in the **Historic** Districts of **Savannah**, Georgia, **Third Edition***.

Carmie earned a B.A. in Art History from Georgia State University and Master’s degrees in Historic Preservation and Architectural History from the Savannah College of Art and Design. She is an alumnus of the Attingham Summer School in England.



**Ashley Meggitt** has been hired as the newest member of the team in the governmental relations associate position at the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA). Ashley helps to develop and advocate for, environment and natural resources policies of vital interest to municipalities in Georgia. By engaging members of the Georgia General Assembly and the Executive Branch Ashley helps to shape public policy.

Ashley worked for three years in the governmental relations office of ACCG both in the research department, and as a lobbyist handling a variety of policy issues, including health and human services, public safety and the courts, local government services, and revenue and finance. Prior to Ashley’s local government work with Georgia’s counties, she worked at the state capitol during Governor Sonny Perdue’s administration. Ashley attended Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia where she attained a Master of Public Administration with a concentration in Policy Analysis and Evaluation. She completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia and holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and a Bachelor of Arts in International Affairs.



**Catherine Muller** is an architect and community designer with a background ranging from software/interface design to community development, project management and communications. Her passion lies in the intersection of psychology, behavior and design—addressing the role of the individual and the community. Her most recent work as a fellow and faculty member at Archeworks in Chicago focused on small and large-scale community-focused urban agriculture projects, including the Mobile Food Collective, whose mission was to foster connection through the medium of food (and which was exhibited at the 2010 Venice Architecture Biennale). She has been fortunate to travel—both observing, and formally studying, a diverse range of civic and community solutions in the US, Europe and Central America. Also a certified yoga instructor, she is a strong advocate for overall, holistic community health—at every scale. She is a Georgia native, recently returned after 15 years.



**Mary Ann Portt** is the Business Integration Manager for the Southeast, leading Bank of America's business integration activities in Washington, DC, Charlotte, Atlanta, Miami, Nashville, Tampa, Orlando, Jacksonville, West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale. In her role, she works closely with Bank of America's Market Presidents, Market Integration Executives and line of business executives at the local market level to deliver the full capabilities of the firm to Bank of America's clients.

Mary Ann joined Bank of America in November 2006 after receiving her International M.B.A. from the University of Memphis. She earned her undergraduate degree from Auburn University and currently resides in Atlanta, GA.



**Benjamin Reeves** is an Associate Director at the international commercial real estate firm Cushman & Wakefield, where he is part of a team of commercial real estate consultants specializing in office tenant representation. He earned his Bachelor of Business Administration from the University of Georgia, is a graduate of the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), and an Eagle Scout recipient. Currently Ben serves on the Board of Directors for the Piedmont Park Conservancy and is a member of the LEAD Atlanta 2013 class. Ben remains involved with the Urban Land Institute, Cushman & Wakefield's Future Leaders, Georgia Conservancy and various other conservation advocacy groups.



**Kyle Smith** spent the early years of his life on Lake Blackshear before moving the short distance to Leesburg, GA, where he attended and graduated from Lee County High School. Kyle obtained a B.S. degree from the University of Georgia and performed post-graduate work at the University of South Carolina with a focus on environmental health. He relocated to Tallahassee, FL and began work for an environmental engineering and remediation company that specialized in the management of petroleum contaminated sites. The pursuit of happiness eventually brought him full circle back to Lake Blackshear where he now runs several businesses and is always open to the next big business idea. Kyle enjoys being outdoors, whether it is for work or play, and his hobbies include fishing, sailing, skiing, shooting, diving, driving, building, planting, growing and learning.



**Heather L. Stanley** is a graduate of Valdosta State University with a BFA in Theatre. She is currently the Managing Director of the historic Rylander Theatre in Americus, Ga. Heather also serves on the Georgia Arts Network Board of Directors and is an active member of the Georgia Presenters Network and Fox Theatre Institute. She has worked professionally with Peach State Summer Theatre: The Official Musical Theatre of Georgia and taught Theatre Arts at the elementary grade level for two years in Albany, GA public schools. As a lifelong resident, Heather is invested in Georgia and committed to seeing communities across the state reach their full potential of growth, economic development, and quality of life.



**Mandy Young** was born and raised in Americus and was an Honor Graduate from Southland Academy in 1997. She attended the University of Georgia and graduated from UGA in 2001 Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Speech Communications/Public Relations. She moved back to Americus after graduating from UGA, and began work at the City of Americus as the Downtown Development Director/Main Street Manager. From 2005-2009, Mandy worked for Sumter Regional Hospital as the Customer Service Director, Director of Physician Relations, Recovery Campaign Coordinator Liaison & Director of Medical Staff Affairs. Mandy assumed her current position as the Community & Economic Development Director for the City of Americus in 2009.

Mandy is actively involved in the community in a variety of aspects. Her affiliations, volunteer work, and civic participation include: Leadership Georgia Class of 2007, UGA Archway Partnership Executive Committee Member, Americus-Sumter Tourism Council Board Member, Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority Recruitment Reference Board Chairman, South Georgia Technical College Marketing Advisory Committee Member, Chamber of Commerce Ambassador Member, Georgia Academy for Economic Development Graduate, and many others.

# Acknowledgements

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We would also like to thank all of the participants of the program this year. Without their hard work and dedication none of this would be possible.

### Group 1:

Ben Andrews  
Emily Boness  
James Carter  
Janet Cummings  
Ann Hanlon  
Hill Hardman  
Bardin Hooks  
Mary Ann Portt  
Denise Grabowski

### Group 2:

Justin Arnold  
Jeff Davis  
Chantee Earl  
Georgia Hodges  
Tyler Mann  
Benjamin Reeves  
Kyle Smith  
Mandy Young  
Catherine Muller

### Group 3:

Gregory Burbidge  
Nicole de Vries  
Howard Franklin  
Kris Hattaway  
Carmie McDonald  
Ashley Meggitt  
Heather Stanley