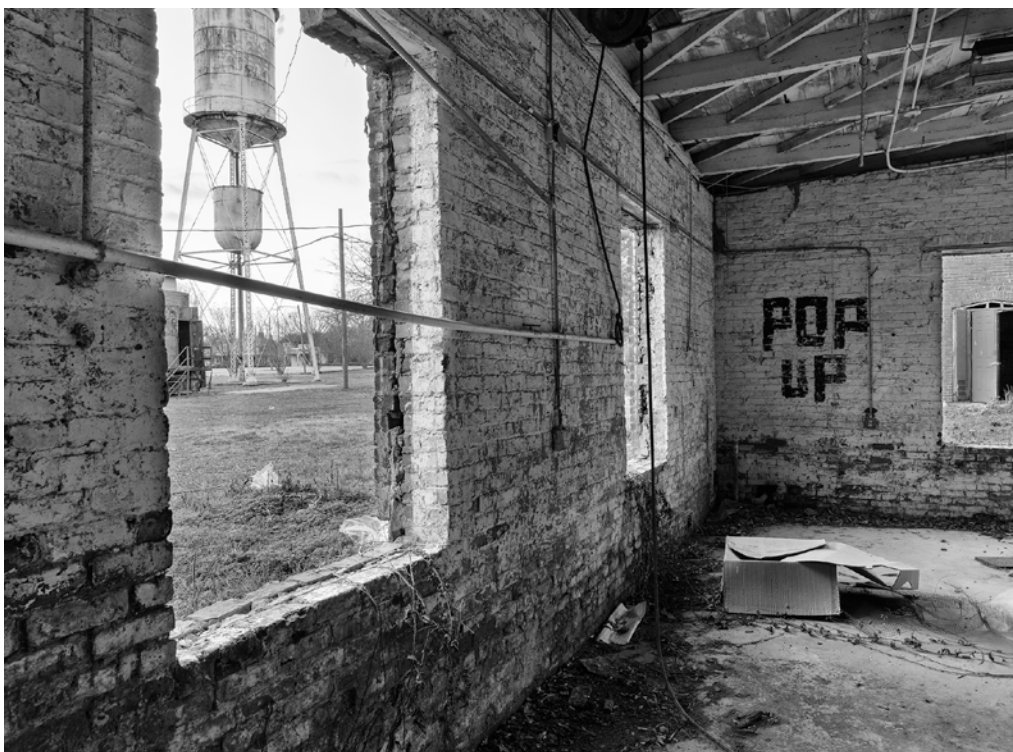


Southern Towers Project

A photographic essay of pre-war water towers in the American South in the context of the industries and communities they once served.



Palmetto Manufacturing Co. / Palmetto, GA / 2026



Hotel Willard / Helena, GA / 2025

Palmetto Manufacturing Co – Palmetto, GA

During World War II, the Palmetto cotton mill was operating exclusively under government contract for cotton duck – an important fabric in military products. The mill ran at its full capacity of three shifts, often six and seven days a week. In a special ceremony on October 20, 1943, the employees of the mill received the Army-Navy "Excellence in Production" Award in recognition of the exceptional performance of each individual employee in the production of war materials.

In support of a nationwide labor-strike by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union in 1965, members of the Local 122 ILGWU picketed in front of the Palmetto Manufacturing Co. The striking workers held signs stating, "UNFAIR LABOR PRACTICE" and "ON STRIKE" against Palmetto Mfg. Co.



Palmetto Manufacturing Co. Wall Text

The Southern Towers Project is a photographic documentation of pre-war iron water towers in the American South. These aging structures were once central elements of the urban landscape, and an essential utility to the manufacturing economy of its time. Now they anonymously remain as metaphors of the economic engines that once dominated the region and have since disappeared within a generation.

The elegance of their designs, the patina of their vine-covered, metal bodies and the engineering intricacies of their rivets, iron beams and support struts are explored in these black and white photos. The photo composition of this series places these towers in the context of the of the industries and communities that these towers were built to serve. A visual hint of these architectural wonders appears in each photo and connects the series to create a story of an economy that once dominated the South.

These abandon factories, and distressed communities have stories to tell and support graphics and text provide a historic context for the viewer experience.



Manchester Cotton Mill / Manchester, GA / 2025

For Exhibit Information Contact:

Kevin M. Coleman
(407) 353-3123

kevin@kevinmcolemanphotography.com

kevinmcolemanphotography.com/southern-towers

Southern Towers Project

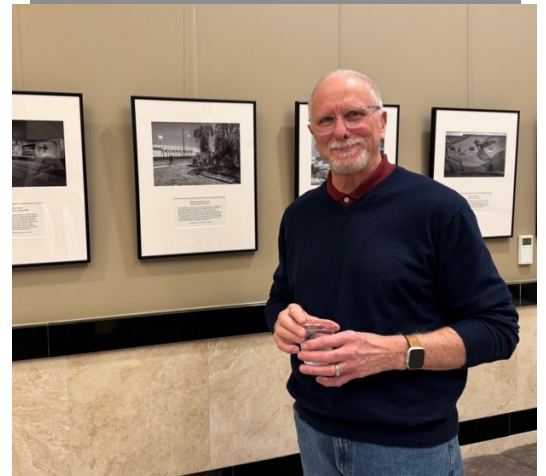
Artist Statement

As an architectural photographer I appreciate the form, function and beauty of these aging structures and became interested in the iron construction and design used prior to the introduction of the big modern water towers of today. The beauty of their designs, the patina of their metal bodies and the intricacies of their engineering were subjects worthy of exploration.

This photographic survey originally began as an architectural documentation of pre-war water towers in its surroundings. But eventually I realized the project was also about the evidence of shifts in labor, industry, and community in the American South. The existence of these iron water towers became metaphors of distressed communities and the economic engines that once dominated the region and have since

disappeared within a generation. These antiquated towers linger in the white noise of the landscape long after the economy has moved on.

This project primarily concentrates on pre-war towers in the style of the traditional hemispherical bottom and "Tin Hat" tops. It is not a documentation of water towers as stand-alone subjects. Each photo composition includes elements of the industry and community these towers were built to serve. To establish a visual thread, the photos are composed to show a tower in some form within the composition. All photos were shot in black & white. This medium was best used to show the aging and texture of the metal and brick subjects.



Artist Bio

Kevin Coleman is a real estate / architectural photographer based in Longwood, Florida. Kevin graduated with a photography degree from the Southeast Center for Photographic Studies located at Daytona State College and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from the University of Central Florida.

Kevin participated in Crealde School of Art's group exhibition "It's a Wonderful Life in Winter Garden" in December of 2024.

"It's a Wonderful Life in Winter Garden" displays downtown in photos

The opening reception is Thursday, Dec. 12, and attendees can meet the photographers and learn about their work.

By Amy Quisenberry Price | 10:21 p.m. December 10, 2024



WEST ORANGE TIMES & OBSERVER NEWS

Share

The Crealde School of Art presents "It's a Wonderful Life in Winter Garden II," a photographic exhibition featuring the work of 10 master class students guided by senior faculty member Peter Schreyer. The exhibition, on view through Jan. 3, 2025, at the Art in Public Places Gallery in Winter Garden City Hall, showcases black-and-white photographs that tell the story of contemporary life in downtown Winter Garden, known for its charm and history.

"Building Boom" by Kevin M Coleman featured in the West Orange Times article about the exhibition

For Exhibit Information Contact:

Kevin M. Coleman (407) 353-3123 kevin@kevinmcolemanphotography.com

kevinmcolemanphotography.com/southern-towers

Southern Towers Project

Exhibit Prints
and Wall Text

Thomaston Mill \ Griffin Manufacturing Co Griffin, GA

This is the site of Griffin's first textile mill, founded by Seaton Grantland and run by W.J. Kincaid for many years. It was one of six plants operating under the Dundee brand name for its terry cloth products. After its collapse in the 1920s it was bought by the Hightower family of Thomaston and consolidated into their group of Thomaston Mills. It continued operations under Thomaston Mills until the company declared bankruptcy in the early 2000s.

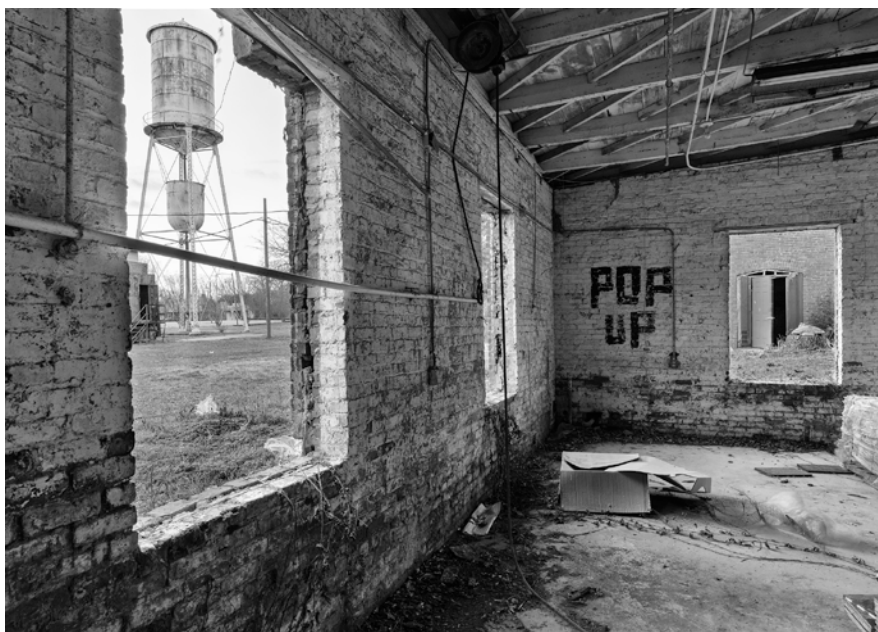
Many industrial mills in the South are being revitalized into multi-family housing and mixed-use developments blending history with modern urban living. The Thomaston Mill is currently under a renovation as a multi-family apartment complex known as the Carlisle.



GRIFFIN MANUFACTURING COMPANY



Griffin Manufacturing Co. / Griffin, GA / 2026



Palmetto Manufacturing Co. / Palmetto, GA / 2026

Palmetto Manufacturing Co – Palmetto, GA

During World War II, the Palmetto cotton mill was operating exclusively under government contract for cotton duck – an important fabric in military products. The mill ran at its full capacity of three shifts, often six and seven days a week. In a special ceremony on October 20, 1943, the employees of the mill received the Army-Navy "Excellence in Production" Award in recognition of the exceptional performance of each individual employee in the production of war materials.

In support of a nationwide labor strike by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union in 1965, members of the Local 122 ILGWU picketed in front of the Palmetto Manufacturing Co. The striking workers held signs stating, "UNFAIR LABOR PRACTICE" and "On STRIKE" against Palmetto Mfg. Co.



WOMEN EMPLOYEES SUPPORTING A NATIONWIDE STRIKE OF THE INTERNATIONAL LADIES' GARMENT WORKERS UNION IN 1965

"No Dollar in the Holler" – Ellaville, GA

There is an exponential growth of dollar stores in the southern United States. Dollar General, Dollar Tree, and Family Dollar are targeting vulnerable communities, opening stores at a breakneck pace in urban and rural areas alike. As a growth strategy, these chains choose locations with cheap space and significant concentrations of low- and moderate-income residents overrunning their less powerful competitors, especially independent grocery stores. This economic squeezing of the independent grocery stores that often serve these communities makes it hard for new businesses to take root and grow.

A grass roots push-back, known as "No Dollar in the Holler" has spread throughout southern communities to slow the unabated growth of these stores.



RESIDENTS PROTESTING THE CONSTRUCTION OF A DOLLAR STORE



No Dollar in the Holler / Ellaville, GA / 2024

Southern Towers Project

ttPe

Exhibit Prints
and Wall Text



Hotel Willard/ Helena, GA / 2025



R.B Kelly Cotton Gin/ Chauncey, GA / 2025

Hotel Willard – Helena, GA

A reflection of the Helena water tower is viewed from a fractured window of the Hotel Willard. The hotel was constructed in the early 1900s for the railroad where the Seaboard and Southern railroad lines crossed and the passenger depot was located. Through the years it was also known The Brick Inn and the Telfair Motor Lodge.

As its status diminished as a grand hotel, the building housed various tenants such as the VFW and a service station. Today it is a dilapidated shell as the town talk is one day it will be renovated to its past glory.



HOTEL WILLARD - CIRCA EARLY 1900'S

R.B. Kelly Cotton Gin – Chauncey, GA

A water tower once provided a water source for the R. B. Kelly Cotton Gin. The unusual tower construction had the support struts anchored onto the roof and sidewalls of the brick mill.

The tower can be seen through the windows of what was once a general store across the street. The cast iron storefront of the general store was built by the Fitzgerald Iron Works Company in Fitzgerald, GA.



RUINS OF THE R. B. KELLY COTTON GIN

Southern Towers Project

tPe

Exhibit Prints
and Wall Text

Rosedale Cemetery – Cuthbert, GA

The Cuthbert water tower was built in 1895 by the Walsh and Weidner Boiler Company of Chattanooga, Tennessee. In 1909 a tornado struck Cuthbert and the top of the water tower was knocked over into the Rosedale Cemetery. The deluge of water dislodged several graves. In the 1940s, the Federal government extended highway 82 to Cuthbert. The city could not afford to move the tower, so the highway was split around it making it the only water tower positioned in the middle of a US highway. Recognized as a Place in Peril by the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation in 2018, the tower was restored through grants and volunteers in 2023.



CUTHBERT WATER TOWER UNDER RENOVATION



Rosedale Cemetery / Cuthbert, GA / 2025



Donalsonville Grain Co. / Donalsonville, GA / 2025

Donalsonville Grain and Elevator Co. Donalsonville, GA

The abandoned warehouse of the Donalsonville Grain and Elevator Company lies in the shadow of the water tower. It was built in 1906 along the tracks of the Alabama Midland Railroad as the Donalsonville Oil Mill. Later, it was called the Planters Product Company and in 1940, it became the Beall Peanut Company. The warehouse, storage sheds, and the water tower that supplied water for the steam driven machines survive.



DONALSONVILLE GRAIN & ELEVATOR COMPANY

Declining Citrus – Winter Garden, FL

Winter Garden, Florida, was founded in the 1850s and grew into a major citrus and agricultural hub, earning its name because of the area's ability to grow citrus year-round. The arrival of the railroad in the 1880s spurred growth and increased the distribution of its citrus products; however, the expansion of the highway system in the 1950s led to the decline of the railroad and double freezes in the 1980s forced the citrus industry to move further south.

Today Winter Garden is preserving its historic downtown and transforming into a popular tourist destination. Citrus warehouses across the city have been repurposed as restaurant and entertainment venues and the 80 ft water tower – built by the Chicago Bridge and Iron works in 1920 – has been refurbished and painted with an image of the town's clock tower and the words "Welcome to Winter Garden".



WINTER GARDEN WATER TOWER – 1920's



Full Moon Tower / Winter Garden, FL / 2024

Southern Towers Project

tPe

Exhibit Prints
and Wall Text

Dixie Plywood and Lumber Company Savannah, GA

At a cross track of the Central of Georgia Railway is the site of the Dixie Plywood and Lumber Company which began operation outside of Savannah in 1945. The iron water tower and vacant warehouses remain on the property that was sold by the company in 2022. The property was also where one of the country's largest sales of enslaved people, known as "The Weeping Time", occurred in the 19th century.

A city commissioned archaeological survey in 2021 found that the site is the location of the former Ten Broeck Racecourse, where more than 400 enslaved men, women and children were auctioned off in 1859. This event is currently memorialized with a historical marker at a small park on Augusta Road about half a mile away from where the tragedy occurred.



MARKER COMMEMORATING "THE WEEPING TIME"



Dixie Plywood and Lumber Co. / Savannah, GA / 2026



Fort Valley Water Works / Fort Valley, GA / 2025

Fort Valley Water Plant – Fort Valley, GA

An article from the January 22, 1925 edition of Fort Valley's *The Leader Tribune* reported that the Water and Light Board of the City of Fort Valley awarded a contract to the R. D. Cole Manufacturing Co., of Newnan, Ga., for the erection of a new 200,000-gallon water tower to the back of the water plant over the existing 50,000-gallon cistern.

The Kiwanis Club of Fort Valley stated that it was "time be free from the old water tower as an eyesore" and devoted the now vacant land "to the logical purpose of a park and playground".



A 1925 INVOICE FROM THE R. D. COLE MANUFACTURING COMPANY

Piggly Wiggly – Jeffersonville, GA

The Piggly Wiggly grocery stores have been operating in the American South since its inception in 1916 in Memphis Tennessee. It was the nation's first self-service grocery store – eliminating the use of a clerk to gather customer orders. By 1922, the chain had grown to 1,200 locations, making it the largest grocery chain in the U.S. at the time. Today it is a franchise system with over 600 stores in 17 States. The Jeffersonville Piggly Wiggly has been operating out of this building since 1977.



PIGGLY WIGGLY #2



Piggly Wiggly / Jeffersonville, GA / 2026

Southern Towers Project

ttFe

Exhibit Prints and Wall Text

Bibb City Mill – Columbus, GA

The Bibb City Mill, known in its time as the Columbus Mill, was built as part of the Bibb Manufacturing Company's local network of mills and textile facilities. Opened in 1902, the Bibb Manufacturing Company operated for 96 years. Often referred to as "the Bibb", the mill produced print cloth, yarn, carpet backing, bed sheets and pillow cases.

The main building was 300 feet long and housed 24,000 spindles. It soon expanded to meet the needs of a growing car industry and World War I military supplies. By 1919, it was over 1000 feet in length and housed over 100,000 spindles.

The Bibb Manufacturing Company began a steady decline in the 1960s and ultimately the company went bankrupt in 1966. The mill sat derelict until October 2008 when a massive fire, attributed to arson, burned the building down to the remaining facade that is present today.



BIBB CITY MILL - 1950



Bibb City Mill / Columbus, GA / 2026



Manchester Cotton Mill / Manchester, GA / 2024

Manchester Cotton Mill – Manchester, GA

Founded in Manchester by the Callaway family, the Manchester Cotton Mill was a major steam-powered mill producing cotton duck, satens, and twills. At its peak, the mill employed around 500 workers. In 1932, the mill was merged with the rest of the Callaway holdings to create the Callaway Mills Company. It was modernized to electric power and continued production until it was shut down in 2002. Arsonist burnt down the factory where today only two smokestacks and a water tower remain.



MANCHESTER COTTON MILL

The Bryant's Inc. Continental Gin Bartow, GA

The Bryant's Inc. Continental Gin and Bonded Warehouse has been in operation Bartow since the 1930's where it processed and stored cotton and later, blue lupine. The processing plant and several storage buildings were updated in 1950. These structures, along with the water tower and several buildings existing from the 1930's, are included with downtown Bartow in the National Register of Historic Places.

Wes Gordy, a retired Jefferson County parole officer with the nickname "Chain Gang", sells produce in the shadow of the 1940 water tower that services the Bryant's Gin. He noted that the aging cotton gin doesn't run full time but is pleased when the boys show up to get the old place running during harvest time.



THE BRYANT'S INC. CONTINENTAL GIN



"Chain Gang" Wes / Bartow, GA / 2026

Southern Towers Project

Exhibit Prints
and Wall Text



Notchaway Tractor CO. / Shellman, GA / 2025



R&L Lift Trucks/ Morven, GA / 2025



TyTy Tire/ TyTy, GA / 2024



Collin's Service Station/ Stillmore, GA / 2024

Strive to Survive - Small Businesses in the South

Economic prosperity in rural communities usually depend on the dominant industry in the region. But with the decline of manufacturing and as plants closed, unemployment rose and jobs never came back. The decline of employment resulted in the emigration of the population for better economic opportunities. And the loss of population resulted in loss of revenue for the local businesses. Today, some businesses in small communities remain as time capsules from the past or struggle to remain economically viable.

Southern Towers Project

ttFe

Exhibit Information

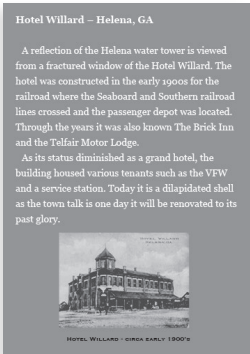
Gallery Wall Schematic



Framed Print & Wall Text Information



11" x 14" PRINT / 16" x 20" FRAME
BLACK METAL FRAME
MUSEUM PLEXI
RAG MATT



5" x 7" PHOTO WALL
TEXT CARD

By 1905, steel water towers had become the preferred type of water storage structure in the United States. These variations resulted in the development of the traditional style legged tower. The Chicago Bridge and Iron Works company was the leading manufacturer of that time and had many projects in the southern United States. By the late 1890's The R. D. Cole Manufacturing company, located in Newnan, GA, became the second leading manufacturer of water towers in the United States. During 1890, the company designed, fabricated and erected the United States' WW first elevated steel tank at Washington, GA.

Water tower design evolution began with the invention of the ellipsoidal bottom in 1907. During this period designed efforts focused on increasing capacity and improving appearance. The characteristic shape of many iron water towers, resembling a large, rounded cylinder on a support structure, earned them the nickname "tin man" due to their similar appearance to the character from *The Wizard of Oz*. By the early 20th Century, this elevated, gravity-fed water tower design became the prevailing design to provide reliable water pressure to growing cities.

11" x 14" EXHIBIT WALL POSTERS

Southern Towers

A Photographic Survey of Iron Water Towers in the American South

This photographic survey originally began as an architectural documentation of pre-war water towers in their surroundings. But eventually the project became about the evidence of shifts in labor, industry, and community in the American South. The existence of these iron water towers became metaphors of the economic engines that once dominated the region and have since diminished or disappeared within a generation. These antiquated towers linger in the white noise of the landscape long after the economy has moved on. The beauty of their designs, the patina of their metal bodies and the intricacies of their engineering anonymously remain for all to discover.

Kevin M Coleman

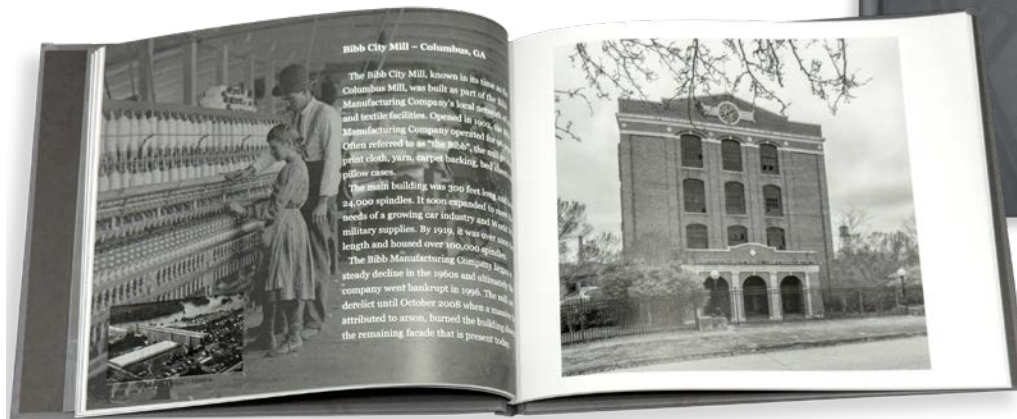
Southern Towers Project

Exhibition Support

Southern Towers Book

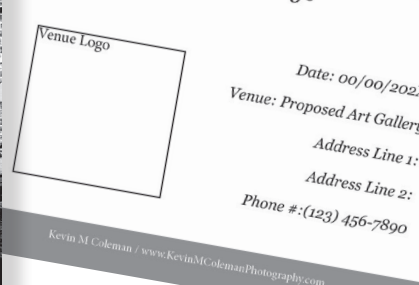
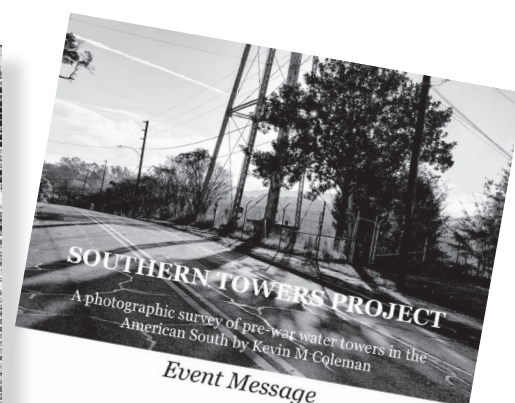
Southern Towers is a self-published book that is available for display for the exhibition. As well as featuring photos chosen for the exhibition, additional images that

were produced during the photo project are also included. The text and graphics explain the evolution of the industrial design of the water tower.



Postcard Mailer / Give-a-Way

A 5" x 7" postcard / announcement is available for mailing and or distribution during the exhibit.



For Exhibit Information Contact:

Kevin M. Coleman
(407) 353-3123

kevin@kevinmcolemanphotography.com / kevinmcolemanphotography.com/southern-towers