

GWINNETT COUNTY, GEORGIA

Partnership Gwinnett

Market Street was by far the most professional economic and community development consultant we've ever worked with. Their knowledge and experience with similar visioning and strategic planning initiatives from around the nation offered clients like us instant credibility and the best chance for success from the start – two factors that no other firm can match.

Jim Maran, Retired President and CEO, Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce



Background

For decades, Gwinnett County typified the “booming suburb.” The county located just northeast of Atlanta was largely rural a half century ago, but it has since grown into the second-largest county in Georgia with nearly 860,000 residents. Along the way, it was frequently among the nation’s fastest growing counties. By the mid-2000s, Gwinnett had firmly established itself as a mature suburb with excellent schools and quality of life. But its rapid ascent had also led to emerging challenges. Its heavily residential character and lack of remaining developable land led to concerns about the sustainability of its tax base. It had also undergone a demographic shift, becoming the most diverse county in the Southeast according to one measure, but had not yet begun to leverage this advantage. And after years of seemingly automatic success, Gwinnett had little economic development infrastructure and no formal strategy.

In 2006, the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce contracted with *Market Street* to facilitate a process called **Partnership Gwinnett**. This strategic visioning process laid the groundwork for future community and economic development efforts in Gwinnett County and established a set of target business sectors. Beginning with an extensive research phase focused on Gwinnett’s overall competitiveness and top industrial growth sectors, *Market Street* created an action plan and implementation guidelines that have helped position Gwinnett for the success it has enjoyed in subsequent years.

Partnership Gwinnett immediately went to work assembling a professional economic development team – now seven full-time employees strong – and securing support and financial commitments from the county government and school system, city governments, community improvement districts, utilities, health systems, and major local employers. This broad base of support was critical in helping the initiative establish immediate credibility. The Great Recession hit soon after the launch of Partnership Gwinnett, and in 2009 the Chamber worked with *Market Street* on a midcourse correction to better align its efforts in the face of new realities. By the end of the original five-year Partnership Gwinnett strategy, the organization had gained a foothold in the community and developed a track record of success. At this point, community leadership again recognized the need to shift away from “start-up” functions and begin to do the work of a



fully grown economic development organization by fine-tuning its existing efforts and initiating new programs. They again brought in *Market Street* to facilitate the development of a new five-year strategy that encompasses three main goal areas: Comprehensive Economic Development, World Class Talent, and Community and Leadership Development.

Implementation Highlights

Partnership Gwinnett has developed an impressive list of implementation since its formal launch in 2007, as evidenced by being awarded the 2010 IEDC International Economic Development Council Program Award for the best Multi-Year Economic Development initiative. Other key successes have included:

- Partnership Gwinnett staff has facilitated more than 100 relocations and expansions – including high profile wins such as NCR – resulting in over 13,000 new jobs and nearly \$900 million in capital investment. The organization has also accelerated its Business Retention and Expansion efforts, contacting over 250 local target industry companies in 2013 and 2014.
- The Amazing Entrepreneur Contest, an annual business plan competition received the 2012 IEDC Gold Excellence award for best entrepreneurship program for communities with populations greater than 500,000. Partnership Gwinnett also launched an online portal for entrepreneurs, GwinnettEntrepreneur.com in 2012 and produced a companion booklet in 2013.
- Partnership Gwinnett engages key industry leaders through six industry councils focusing on target industries such as healthcare and other key missions such as global business. The councils have contributed to successful programs including the Movers & Makers Awards honoring top local performers in the manufacturing and supply chain initiatives, and the inaugural Healthcare Summit in 2012 that was attended by more than 85 industry leaders.
- Partnership Gwinnett has developed a robust global business program. In 2013, economic development staff and other community leaders visited Japan, China, Denmark, and Germany.
- In 2010, the Gwinnett County Public Schools received the prestigious Broad Prize, given annually to the nation's top urban school district. In 2013, the district was named Georgia's Green Ribbon District, boasting 125 Energy STAR-certified schools.
- In 2013, the Georgia Board of Nursing approved the development of a Bachelor's in Nursing at Georgia Gwinnett College and the program will admit its first students in Fall 2014. The college also broke ground on a \$30 million Allied Health and Science building in 2013. In addition, the Gwinnett Medical Center partnered with Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine in 2013 to begin a residency program.
- Gwinnett is a very racially and ethnically diverse community. In, 2013, according to ESRI data, the county was the most diverse community in the southeast. The Partnership's Diversity Task Force completed the first Comprehensive Diversity Plan for Gwinnett County in 2013 and is working to formalize strategies to increase representation of racial and ethnic minorities in Gwinnett leadership.

