**Archway seeks to help redefine Dalton area**

The Archway Partnership was founded in 2005 at the University of Georgia. The idea was to provide communities across the state with access to the resources of higher education to foster community development in a number of areas. Archway professionals are in eight communities. They work to connect those communities with the resources of the University System of Georgia.

The Daily Citizen met with local Archway officials recently to see where the initiative stands in Dalton and Whitfield County.

**Melissa Lu, Archway professional for Dalton-Whitfield County:** Dalton-Whitfield was selected as the potential region for a long time, however, I don't think the program was slated to come here until about 2011, and because of the advocacy of local citizens — their thoughts about the great need in the area at the time — the program was able to come here as early as 2009.

**TDC:** How will this partnership benefit the residents here in a way that they can see in their daily lives and how soon will some of these benefits start showing up?

**Melissa:** We're setting priorities, and it's all based on citizen input. For example, when we had the listening session last fall, we're taking all that data, input, Melissa's interviewing all kinds of people in the community, we're doing other focus groups and we're choosing what we do based on what we've heard. The community dashboard if you will, that's what we're working with.

**TDC:** Have some of those needs already been identified?

**Melissa:** Rick Hooper, chair of the local Archway Partnership: The listening session was our community's visioning process and kind of our next step with that is we want to make sure that we reach out not only to people that know about the listening session and participated in it but we're working with the Planning Institute at the University of Georgia to help us identify other ways that we can make sure that we're heard from everybody in the community, and we're in the process of working on that right now. And that will be yet another step in a continuing visioning process for the community.

**Melissa:** Our current Archway Partnership includes community leaders coming up with those priorities that we've heard from the listening session. We've heard from the listening visioning process for the community.

**TDC:** What's new or different from perhaps some other partnerships?

**Rick Hooper:** TDC: A lot of what you're talking about are efforts that have been going on for years here, there was Target Tomorrow, Grow Greater Tomorrow, the chamber and their efforts. How do people who live here say that you are not duplicating efforts? What's new or different from this?

**Hooper:** TDC: I think the main difference is that we're about achieving some substantial progress on a new initiative. What we've been doing is putting some additional priorities on something that has been going on for years. And that might be interest in community leaders coming up with an action plan, and it's not a situation where our local leaders might hire consultants to come in and say here's what we think you need to do. This is a partnership where you're actually engaged with the University System of Georgia and all of its resources so when you identify a priority that then you are able to reach out to the university system and all of its resources and get assistance from the system to help you with those priorities. I think that component makes it different than just an action plan or just a vision.

**TDC:** We want to be about getting things done, we want to be about setting goals, we want to be about achieving those goals, we want to be about accountability.

**Rick:** The way we see this is different from perhaps some of the other things that have occurred in this community is that this is a partnership, it's not just one local community leaders coming up with an action plan, and it's...
We’re going to have students to help guide the focus groups. I think a major component is we do try to use the resources first that we have in our community, but having the entire system at hand to be able to use is really a big benefit for Archway.

— John Schwenn, Dalton State College president and co-chair of the local Archway Partnership

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is simply that this is an ongoing process, it’s not an event. That’s one reason why the community factor that should not be lost. This is the responsibility of the executive committee has committed to do this locally, of their time to work differently, and we’ll try to see that some things that don’t belong in our offices and we’ll try to see that some things that don’t belong there from a consult-

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Catoosa & Whitfield Counties

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“What can’t be lost here too is there’s a real benefit for the students, and I’d say some of the faculty, too. Students are going to go real-world, practical experience with this, and some of the faculty are, too.” — Ric Hooper, chair of the local Archway Partnership

The Northwest Georgia Trade and Convention Center hosted almost 300 Dalton and Whitfield County community leaders and interested residents to kick off issue-oriented conversations with the University of Georgia (UGA) the Archway Partnership is a joint venture between Public Service and Outreach and Cooperative Extension at the university and the local governments, businesses, and nonprofit organizations in the counties where Archway is located.

**Discussion Summary**

Partnership is a joint venture between Public Service and Outreach and Cooperative Extension at the university and the local governments, businesses, and nonprofit organizations in the counties where Archway is located.

**Top priorities for each of the Archway portals in the state**

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<tr>
<th>Clayton County</th>
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<tr>
<td>Enhance Health Care</td>
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<td>Support Education</td>
<td>Foster Innovative Health Care</td>
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<td>Promote Economic Development</td>
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<td>Coordinate Services</td>
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<td>Graduation Rate Enhancements</td>
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<td>Create Affordable Housing</td>
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<td>Enhance Recycling Efforts</td>
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<td>Hart County</td>
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<td>Support Education</td>
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<td>Assist with Planning and Visioning</td>
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<td>Develop Leaders</td>
<td>Improve Air Quality</td>
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<td>Address Housing Issues</td>
<td>Create Affordable Housing</td>
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What are the trends, forces and factors that will impact your community in the next decade? What will your organization, agency, entity, business, decreasing or cyclical? Not surprisingly, much of the discussion centered on the state of the economy. Some were closely tied to the housing market. First, major challenges. Many feel that Dalton/Whitfield County has suffered more than other places because of the heavy reliance on the carpet industry. Consolidation of the carpet industry has resulted in fewer companies making products within the county, leading to losses in employment. There were few options for those who lose their jobs. The high unemployment rate is negatively impacting the number of job opportunities in the community. There are few new opportunities for the 36 people in the workforce that are unemployed. Costs for higher education have increased, making it harder for families to afford college. In an attempt to identify issues confronting Dalton and Whitfield County, facilitators from UGA and Dalton State College led small group discussions around three key questions. The following report presents the results of the session. In the current economy, the population has become more transient. The number of Hispanic students has increased. There are more and more students who are not in school, commuting to school. As a result of this, the dropout rate has increased. The Hispanic community has not been well served on the county level. Many of the Hispanic students are focused on is their survival, their immediate needs. Without the community service, they won’t be able to get the education they need. One of the big issues is the increase in homelessness. There is a perception that the Hispanic community would have had that opportunity, for possibly something very good in the Hispanic community. Dalton/Whitfield County has the second highest unemployment rate in the nation at one point. The unemployment rate is the second highest in the nation at one point. The area is also experiencing some negative effects of the housing crisis. Some of the Hispanic community are having a hard time finding affordable housing. There is the perception that the Hispanic community has not been well served on the county level. Many of the Hispanic students are focused on is their survival, their immediate needs. Without the community service, they won’t be able to get the education they need.
challenging. Still, there are concerns about schools preparing students to be the future workforce. High school graduates are not technologically oriented, although the schools are considered to be technologically advanced because of the SPLOST. Career Pre-K opportunities in the community are not able to meet the current demands.

Another major trend in Dalton/Whitfield County, also tied to the current economic conditions, is the state of health care. Health insurance costs have increased, yet there are few network options. Employer health care plans are not accepted at local provider facilities — there is a gap between local systems and employer insurance. Local public health provided by the county and state is available if one meets the requirements. Many people are using emergency rooms for primary care, because their insurance isn’t accepted in local private practices or they are uninsured. Declining payments to hospitals and doctors for their services, in turn, are making it harder to recruit doctors and other medical professionals.

Based on the trends, etc., that you identified, what are the specific things that need to be done in order to adapt to the change? (Start with a verb.)

Most discussions focused on diversifying the local economy. Although there were some advocates for working to keep the carpet industry in place or even expanding it, Understanding the industry in the region and becoming a local service hub for those industries is one way to diversify. Another is to capture some of the Volkswagen work from Chattanooga, or expand the existing chemical and polymer industries beyond what they do for the carpet industry. Other ideas are to increase the technology research industry by creating “server-farms” in abandoned buildings. This would increase the level of technology in the community and bring in technology workers. An economic development professional empowered by all parties with some significant powers is needed to recruit industry, pulling together all of the various strategic plans. Expansion of other sectors besides industry could help diversify the economy. Jobs in the service sector such as health care and information technology, for example, could bring jobs.

The area needs small family farms with fresh food and sustainable agriculture; economic development could come from agriculture. Economic development could also come from local assets like good road networks for distribution or Civil War history and the environment for tourism. The community needs to look at other similar-sized cities like Rome and Huntsville, and at Chattanooga, to see how they developed and adapted what they have done to Dalton/Whitfield County.

Increasing support for small businesses would help increase diversity in many sectors of the local economy. Dalton could support small businesses with utilities and infrastructure, and by allowing business development to capture some of the assets like good road networks and Civil War history. State College has resources through the small business development center. The community could create a business incubator, or one specifically for the service industry, and do its part to support small businesses by including them in the overall plan.
Creating more upscale shopping opportunities, more grocery stores, movie theaters, etc., encourages people to stay in Dalton rather than going to Chattanooga.

Developing a downtown pedestrian area, with arts, music and activities, can increase the number of potential customers for downtown small businesses. Reviving the rules on alcohol-related may allow businesses to attract more customers, increasing the number of locally owned restaurants and expanding the dining options beyond the current existing chain restaurants. Local flavor entices people to stay home to eat and attracts customers from other communities. Having things to do in the evening hours is an important component of any effort to continue young professionals to move to or remain in Whitfield County.

Another way to encourage young people to visit businesses and participate in community activities is to cultivate a downtown pedestrian area with arts, music and activities. The community needs a place for people to meet and coordinate so issues raised. Local organizations can cooperate with each other. They volunteer and provide a safe place for them to go. Schools could also deliver community education classes, consumer education, arts, technology or sports. And the television station could teach English-to-Spanish, and teach Spanish to English-speakers.

Dalton State College in a potential partner for Whitfield County school systems and the region as a whole. In addition to providing student teachers, the college should be involved in the Career Academy, and have some of its programs delivered in buildings next to the high school. Continuing education program needs to be restarted, in part, to help build community. Expanding the Career Academy into “High Tech High” — computer and business learning — and expanding it to teach basic skills in other career paths for graduates, such as horticulture, food service or horticulture. Students need additional programs that could be useful for economic development opportunities. It would be a recreational destination, and it would attract more people downtown, and help with redevelopment efforts. Developing a downtown pedestrian area with arts, music and activities can be an engine for economic development.

What are the opportunities, assets, etc., that we can use to attract young people to work in Dalton? Despite public education and workforce development efforts. The educational opportunities the Career Academy and Whitfield County community, with books and the college should cooperate with the Career Academy into “High Tech High” — computer and business learning — and expanding it to teach basic skills in other career paths for graduates, such as horticulture, food service or horticulture. Students need additional programs that could be useful for economic development opportunities. It would be a recreational destination, and it would attract more people downtown, and help with redevelopment efforts. Developing a downtown pedestrian area with arts, music and activities can be an engine for economic development. The educational opportunities the Career Academy and Whitfield County school systems.

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