Five Years and Growing: Archway Partnership Links Communities to Higher Education Resources

In its fifth year, the Archway Partnership has extended its reach to eight portals statewide, utilizing all available resources in communities to create remarkable results.

By Anna Ferguson

Season upon season, the Sumter County Fairgrounds are abuzz with life. Fairs, carnivals, family reunions, trade shows and conferences are held on the county property throughout the year, cementing the grounds as a beloved and historical part of the region. So much so that, in early 2009, the Sumter County Board of Commissioners purchased the 22-acre fairground property formerly owned by the Fairgrounds Association, with the intent of maintaining the property as a public use space, as well as adding an 18,000-sq. ft. building space and covered pavilion.

Through a collaboration with the University of Georgia Archway Partnership in the Spring of 2009, students from the College of Environment and Design participated in a Charrette — an intense and creative work session during which a design team focuses on a particular design problem and arrives at a collaborative solution — to develop a conceptual site plan for use of the facility and grounds, while holding true to the site’s important history.

Archway is now implementing the next step in the fairground revitalization, by tapping the University’s Terry College of Business Leonard Leadership Scholars Program. This partnership, as well as the Charrette design, will help to cover all aspects of facility and business management for the fairgrounds, including a local and regional marketing strategy, contract development, insurance needs, and local ordinances.

Such varied projects and cohesive collaborations are not new to the Archway Partnership. Since the Archway Partnership was established in 2005, hundreds of university undergraduate and graduate students, as well as staff and community members, have worked on collaborative projects, allowing students to obtain real-world experience in distinct fields of study while addressing community identified needs.

A Multipronged Organization

“In its five-year history, the Archway Partnership has distinguished itself as a multi-prong organization, aiding not only students with outreach initiatives, but also incorporating university faculty, state officials, as well as community leaders and residents into its mission,” said former ACCG Executive Director Jerry Griffin.

Beginning in 2005, Archway launched with a pilot program in Moultrie/Colquitt County in southwest Georgia. At the time, the community was experiencing an unprecedented period of growth, the result of a 1,400-job economic development project, expansion of existing industries, and an influx of retirees. For its starter community, Archway assisted in pairing community leaders and officials with higher education resources to plan for smart economic growth, community development and to address other key priorities in the region. Since the program began in Moultrie/Colquitt County, a variety of issues and needs have been addressed, including efforts to increase graduation rates, more efficient coordination of public housing and expansion of after school programs.

“The Moultrie/Colquitt County pilot program was and continues to be a major success, serving as a model for how the program was intended to operate," said James Bishop, a member of the University System of Georgia Board of Regents and a catalyst for the creation of the Archway Partnership.

“When we were first approached about establishing Archway, we all knew it was going to be a positive experience,” said Regent James Bishop, “I have been a major proponent for Archway since the idea was shown to me, and I will continue to be.
It appeared to be then, and has proven to be now, a win-win situation for all involved."

**Eight Community Portals**

The properly executed pilot and smart business principles used in creating the Archway Partnership have served the initiative well. Since the Partnership embarked in its first county, the program has expanded to reach eight community portals throughout the state, with Dalton/Whitfield County coming on as the newest community in the fall of 2009.

"It is our job to listen to the needs and priorities of the community, and find the higher education resources to help communities achieve their goals," Archway Partnership Director Mel Garber said. Steps to include and utilize all available resources in the community, be it local officials, health care systems or other college campuses, create a unified front for fulfilling priorities in each Archway portal.

When the Southeast Georgia Health System’s Senior Care Center in Glynn County needed an extra set of hands to establish a resource system for its newly created Alzheimer and dementia wing, officials looked to the Archway Partnership. That collaboration led to a student-facilitated project, where a graduating senior in public health generated a series of resources that help staff and patients better assess and organize their needs.

"Being involved with Archway and having hands-on experience through this project was a vital part of my college experience," said Morgan Bishop, the student who conducted the Senior Care Center project. "More than that, this project impacted other people's lives in a very positive way, and that is so rewarding."

In some situations, the Archway model includes collaborating with other higher education institutions, such as in Sumter County, where Archway partners are working with the South Georgia Technical College and Georgia Southwestern to create a more college-centered community.

**Evolved to a University System Platform**

The Archway Partnership has evolved from a University of Georgia platform to a University System of Georgia platform. This move enables the Partnership to form a more cohesive and encompassing plan for statewide growth.

By all accounts, Archway Partnership projects have been "a complete success, as you can see by the work they are undertaking," said Regent James Bishop. "Archway has shown it is dedicated to developing healthy communities throughout Georgia."

Examples of that dedication, displayed in a multitude of arenas and projects, can be seen statewide.

Take Hart County, for example. Fostering and flourishing a strong, cohesive community leadership base was identified as a major priority for the county. In response, the Archway Partnership assisted in facilitating discussions and planning to re-institute the Leadership Hart program, which had been inactive for several years.

Pulaski County boosts a diverse array of Archway footprints. Currently, a major project involves the National Park Service and the Middle Georgia Regional Commission in developing and implementing the grant-funded Hawkinsville-Pulaski County Ocmulgee Riverfront Park Master Concept Plan. This ongoing project, pinpointed as an economic and community development priority need, is to develop a riverwalk, fishing piers, multi-use trails, recreational facilities, and other infrastructure improvements at the county-owned Mile Branch Boat Landing.

"Instead of sitting on the corner just talking about doing and changing things, Archway has given us the tools, resources and expertise to actually do it," said Pulaski County Commissioner Brooks Bailey. "We are really just scratching the surface and Archway is here to help us help ourselves dig deeper and rely on ourselves to improve the quality of life for all of our citizens."

In Clayton County, access to affordable, quality health care has been labeled as a core concern for the community. There, the community’s Archway Professional worked to coordinate efforts between higher education resources and community health leaders to apply for a grant to execute a Federally Qualified Health Center, a nonprofit or public comprehensive primary care center that taps special funding to provide care to patients who normally could not afford primary care.

Washington County, too, ranked health care on the top of its priority list. So much so, that an additional Archway Professional was placed in the community in an issue-based role, to assist with long-term goals and larger-scale projects. One such community-identified project was the health professional to RN Bridge program, a year-long program that trains Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) to become Registered Nurses (RNs).

In recent years, that community has had a drastic shortage of Registered Nurses. Instead of recruiting from outside the community, officials at Washington County Regional Medical Center, the Sandersville Technical College and Darton College worked with the Archway Partnership to develop and institute the Bridge program, to make use of health care professionals already living in the community. When plans were announced for the program, more than 90 individuals expressed interest, and the initial class of 25 participants is on schedule to graduate in fall 2010, said Laura Bland, the Archway Health Professional in Washington County.

According to ACCG Executive Director Ross King, enhancing public and private relationships with higher education by way of community involvement is a key priority for ACCG, state leaders and officials. "Archway has established itself as a major portal for those initiatives," King said.

"I am extremely pleased with the work Archway has conducted with its county partners," King said. "Archway brings a tremendous number of assets to help assist its member communities by underscoring collaboration."

For more information about the Archway Partnership, visit www.archwaypartnership.uga.edu or call (706) 542-1422.

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