Hart County Tourism Efforts Increased with
Megaramp Facility Improvements
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The Gum Branch Megaramp Facility on Lake Hartwell was funded through the State of Georgia’s Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Go Fish Georgia initiative in partnership with the City of Hartwell and Hart County Government.

In the summer of 2009, The City of Hartwell and Hart County Government requested assistance from Hart County Archway to identify a resource to develop a strategic tourism marketing plan for the yet-to-be-built megaramp. Bobby Chappell, a graduate student in Natural Resource and Recreation Tourism in UGA’s Warnell School of Forestry, spent the summer working with the Hart County Chamber of Commerce’s Tourism Taskforce, Hart County Government, and other community members to collect information and develop the plan.

Construction of the megaramp was completed in summer 2010. During the construction of the facility, a number of trees along the shoreline surrounding the facility were inadvertently removed. The impact was that the site of the facility lost some of its natural beauty, some erosion began to occur along the shoreline, and homeowners whose lake houses formerly faced a wooded peninsula now faced the large asphalt parking lot constructed as part of the Gum Branch Megaramp.

In response, the Hart County Archway Partnership tapped two landscape architecture interns, Colin Owen and Carmen Miranda from UGA’s top ranked College of Environment and Design, to assist the City of Hartwell and Hart County Government with creating site-wide landscape designs to reforest the shoreline buffer, create an entryway to the facility, and add shade and natural beauty to the facility. Owen and Miranda worked with Hart County Cooperative Extension Coordinator Charles Rice to ensure that the plants included in the designs were appropriate for the site and met the City and County’s specifications for low maintenance and drought tolerance. Miranda created sketches and planting plans for the entryway area, including a nautical design for the wooden frame to support the entry sign.

The metal Gum Branch Megaramp entryway sign was designed by Hart County High School students and features logos from all of the groups that collaborated on the megaramp project. A HCHS construction skills class constructed the sign frame/posts according to the design created by the Archway landscape architecture intern Carmen Miranda. Class members from 2009-2010 Leadership Hart have plans to implement part of the landscape plan as part of their class capstone community project. In addition, the City of Hartwell secured a tree grant to plant some of the trees included in the site plans designed by Owen and Miranda.

During Fall semester 2010, a team of project management students from Terry College of Business worked with the City, County, Cooperative Extension, and Archway to develop a project plan for the Megaramp. The purpose of the project plan is to divide the remaining development of the facility into phases and create a rough timeline and estimated budget. Establishing a project plan will facilitate the process of applying for grants or in-kind assistance to help complete the work that remains. This will enable the City of Hartwell and Hart County Government to continue developing the Megaramp as a tourism asset for the community.

Advancing Community Priorities: Hart County leaders and community members recognize the potential of developing local tourism assets such as Lake Hartwell and historic downtown. Some of these benefits include a positive impact on local businesses, providing opportunities for entertainment, improving quality of life, generating tax revenue, and lowering local property taxes. When the Hart County Archway Partnership was established in 2008, the community as a priority issue selected tourism.