Clayton County Hosts Third Annual Teen Summit  
By Gail Webb, Sue Chapman, and Shannon Knepp

For the third consecutive year, Clayton County teens have come together from each high school to learn leadership skills and enhance school spirit.

In 2009, the Clayton Archway Partnership Executive Committee identified youth involvement in the community as part of their work plan. The teen summit was initiated that year with the goal of improving leadership skills and providing opportunities for student engagement. “We want students to be active in their schools and be leaders.” Clayton County Public Schools Communications Specialist, Rhonda Burnough, said. “We want them to be a part of school.”

Ranging from sophomores to seniors, six students from each high school are chosen annually to be a part of the summit, resulting in a total of 63 students from across Clayton County. The students represent a variety of economic and educational backgrounds.

Students attending the summit have the opportunity to hear from professionals within the county, participate in leadership panels, and learn valuable tools to take back to their schools and community. The 2011 Teen Summit included several seminars, including one from the Solicitor General about little known legal issues behind cell phone usage. Another seminar taught students about “self branding,” and how they present themselves to their community. These conversations were intended to teach students about maintaining their own self worth through good decisions. This year’s leadership panel included a State Judge, the director of the Clayton County Parks and Recreation Department, a member of the Georgia Legislature, and the CEO and President of the Clayton County Chamber of Commerce.

The ultimate goal of the summit is to show students that they have a strong voice within their school and community in order to get students more involved within Clayton County. “What we have seen from previous summits is students who felt that they didn’t have a voice before become more active in school clubs or the student council,” Cyd Cox, president of the Clayton County PTA, said. “They are always very excited about doing it again the next year.”

Collaborators within the community include the Clayton County Public Schools, the PTA, the Clayton County Collaborative, Clayton County Board of Health, the Clayton County Parks and Recreation Department, UGA Cooperative Extension and the Archway Partnership.

Realizing that the summit would need ongoing coordination to be sustained, the Archway Partnership assisted in identifying a permanent “home.” Both the Clayton County Collaborative and the Board of Health have committed resources to sustaining the Teen Summit. “We wanted to make sure that the Teen Summit had a home,” said Cox. “That it had funding, so it could continue on and not fall by the wayside.”

**Advancing Community Priorities:** Having identified youth involvement as a community priority, the Clayton County Archway Partnership has worked to make the Teen Summit a sustainable event that shows tangible results for participating youth.