As the “Carpet Capital of the World,” Dalton, Georgia has always been a leader in innovation and manufacturing. Only a few years ago, the carpet industry was booming as the housing market continued to grow. But with the economic recession beginning in 2008, the community was hit hard—manufacturing companies started reducing production and closing plants, causing hundreds of employees to lose their jobs. The high unemployment rate took its toll on other local businesses in the area, and soon vacant storefronts and empty warehouses became commonplace.

When the Archway Partnership Executive Committee commissioned a community visioning process in 2010, issues around the state of the economy and its impact on local industry topped the chart as the greatest concern in the area. It was apparent that the major issues in Dalton-Whitfield County included sustaining and supporting existing industry, diversifying the current economic base, and becoming a hub for knowledge-based innovation. To accomplish these goals, two Archway work groups were established in 2010-2011: the Successful, Sustainable Industries Issue Work Group and the Diverse, Forward-Thinking Economy Issue Work Group.

With the assistance of higher education resources coordinated through the Archway Partnership and under the leadership of Dalton-Whitfield Joint Development Authority Director Elyse Cochran, Dalton Utilities CEO Don Cope, and Mohawk Engineer James Gordy, devoted community members have made the following accomplishments:

- **Rebranding the Floorcovering Industry**
  
  To support existing industry, UGA Master’s of Business Administration student, Charles Simpson, teamed up with Leadership Dalton Whitfield program participants, community leaders, and existing industry representatives to develop a comprehensive rebranding campaign for the floorcovering industry. Simpson’s task was to measure existing perceptions of the industry and develop a comprehensive plan for addressing misconceptions among those representing tomorrow’s workforce. In December 2011, Simpson presented his research and recommendations to the community. Local leaders are currently working to implement his suggested strategies and tactics.

- **Enhancing the Carbondale Business Park Entrance**
  
  One of the community’s greatest assets for economic development is the designation of 187 acres of land in south Whitfield County as the Carbondale Business Park. To ensure that the park is as inviting as possible to industrial prospects, the Archway Partnership sponsored two undergraduate students from UGA’s College of Environment and Design in 2010 to work with Whitfield County to develop a landscaping plan and new entrance for the Carbondale Business Park. The students presented plans to Whitfield County at the conclusion of their internship. Currently, the Dalton-Whitfield Joint Development Authority is implementing those plans.

- **Creating an Inspiration for Market Street**
  
  To make Dalton’s “front door” more attractive to visitors, prospects, and residents, the Archway Partnership commissioned a graduate student from the UGA College of Environment and Design to develop plans for a formerly thriving outlet mall near Dalton’s most popular interstate exit. Student Sam Keller, working under the direction of community leadership, developed a three phase concept for the area that enhances green space, provides housing options for students and the elderly, and capitalizes upon the area’s interstate access. The Joint Development Authority is currently sharing these plans with existing property owners and developers.
• **Creating a new Dalton-Whitfield Brand for Economic Development**

Following the rebranding campaign work with the floorcovering industry, the Dalton-Whitfield Joint Development Authority commissioned graduate student, Charles Simpson, to assist with another branding project. Simpson was asked to help rejuvenate the community’s economic development message. Using research gathered by the Archway Partnership Diverse, Forward-Thinking Economy Issue Work Group, Simpson helped to create the slogan, “Dalton: Tomorrow’s Innovations. Daily,” to be featured on marketing and advertising materials used for business recruitment. Simpson designed a *Georgia Trend* magazine advertisement highlighting the low cost of doing business, available infrastructure, and amenities in Dalton-Whitfield County. He also created an ad that was featured in the *Dalton Daily Citizen*, 2012 Progress Edition.

• **Developing Innovative Messaging to Site Location Consultants**

Simpson also developed a Valentine’s Day direct mail marketing campaign for consultants who manage site acquisitions for companies looking to relocate or expand. The marketing campaign featured a box with a heart-shaped design on the cover that contained a sample of Godiva chocolates and “Valentines.” Each Valentine card shared the benefits of locating a business in Dalton-Whitfield County. The Joint Development Authority reports they have received numerous inquiries from consultants as a result of the mailer.

• **Developing a Small Business Network Website**

With the help of UGA Master’s in Non-Profit Organizations and Master’s in Public Administration students as well as faculty from the Small Business Development Center, the Dalton-Whitfield Joint Development Authority was able to develop a framework for a website designed to provide information for small businesses and potential businesses. The website provides simple, basic information for businesses starting up, relocating or expanding. Also available is a list of local mentors, in areas such as banking or accounting, who can provide support to new or expanding businesses.

• **Determining the Need for an Incubator**

The idea of developing a business incubator to help start-ups successfully get off the ground evolved from discussions in the Diverse Forward-Thinking Economy Issue Work Group. After touring the business incubator in Chattanooga and entertaining guest speakers on the topic, the issue work group recommended to the Archway Partnership Executive Committee that it pursue a three-phase study conducted by the Georgia Institute of Technology Enterprise Innovation Institute to determine whether the community is ready for a business incubator. With partial funding provided by the Archway Partnership, the Joint Development Authority entered into a contract in April 2012 with Georgia Tech to collaborate on the initial stages of this study.

• **Establishing a Network of Angel Investors**

Leaders in the Diverse, Forward-Thinking Economy Issue Work Group repeatedly heard that potential companies thinking of moving or expanding to Dalton-Whitfield County needed assistance with capital investment because of the economy-imposed stringent banking regulations. As a result of these discussions, the concept for Angel Investors—local individuals who can provide investment capital to bring new businesses to the area—was developed and potential candidates identified. The Joint Development Authority is currently working with these Angel Investors to prepare applicants.

**Advancing Community Priorities:** Economic development is an arduous, competitive process that does not always show immediate results. Prior to 2008, Dalton-Whitfield County was not as actively involved in recruiting businesses to the area. Today, thanks to the support of the Archway Partnership and the higher education resources it provides, the Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce, and local government and business entities, the Dalton-Whitfield Joint Development Authority is making progress on creating awareness and promoting the benefits of the local area. All of these efforts are starting to pay off as the number of inquiries into available properties in the City of Dalton and Whitfield County has significantly increased.