Connecting Washington County to the World
By Kim Jackson and Casie Walker

Through UGA’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government, the Archway Partnership provided an opportunity to enhance Washington County efforts in economic development.

“I think it’s important when you are working on economic development to bring a very broad perspective,” said Mel Garber, Director of the Archway Partnership. “One way to do that is to provide an international experience.”

Community officials from Hart and Washington counties as well as Archway faculty members had the opportunity to visit China in June 2012. While there, they were able to gain insight on economic development in order to better understand that aspect of their own communities.

The Archway group traveled to Shanghai, Nanchang, and Beijing, cities where the Vinson Institute provides training for government officials. During meetings, the group compared Archway’s model for working with communities to the Chinese officials’ models. Not only did these meetings benefit the Archway Partnership, but they also benefited the Chinese officials. Both groups were able to gain insight into each other’s opportunities and challenges that they face in their respective communities. By sharing their stories with each other, they can learn the best practices to overcome issues that they have in common.

The visit to China is the first step towards the larger goal for more international economic development opportunities for Washington County and other Archway communities. Developing relationships between Washington County leaders and Chinese officials is an important benefit that may lead to future economic development opportunities. The next steps include Chinese delegates traveling to Washington County before the end of the year.

“While some of our kaolin companies have business ties to China, this trip will hopefully be the beginning of other local businesses having the opportunity to expand their international relationships. We look forward to hosting delegations from China in the near future,” said Ree Garrett, Director of Development and Physician Recruitment for Washington County Regional Medical Center, who participated in the trip.

The expected impact of the trip will span for years as Washington County will have the opportunity to host delegations and build relationships with Chinese officials visiting Georgia on exchanges with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government.

Advancing Community Priorities: One of Washington County's key priorities is economic development and attracting new business and industry. This trip to China was an opportunity for the community to begin building familiarity and relationships with officials in China. These connections are extremely strategic because China has a rapidly expanding economy and is a global economic power.