

# STRONG ECONOMIES, RESILIENT COUNTIES

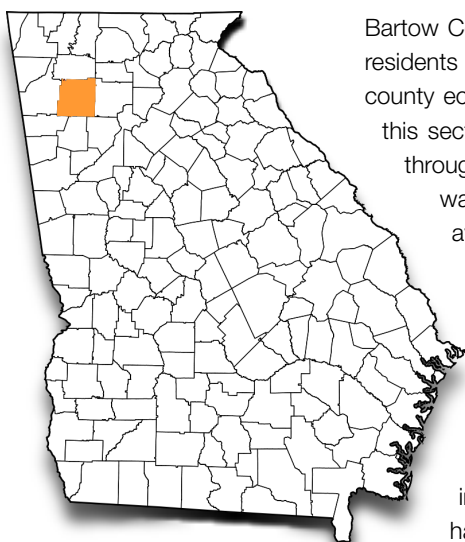
The Role of Counties in Economic Development



NACo WHY COUNTIES MATTER PAPER SERIES • ISSUE 1 • July 2014 • [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org)

## BARTOW COUNTY, GEORGIA

### Improving Income Opportunities for County Residents



Bartow County, located in northeastern Ga., is a mid-sized county of more than 100,000 residents and part of one of the largest metropolitan areas in the country — Atlanta. The county economy is strong in manufacturing, with more than a quarter of all jobs found in this sector. The county unemployment rate remained lower than the overall state rate throughout the recession and recovery, but 2012 personal income level in the county was \$29,100, 78 percent of the state average and only 67 percent of the national average. The county, in partnership with others addressed this issue with a double-pronged strategy; by expanding the pool of employers in the county through the creation of the Highland75 industrial park and by improving the skills of the county workforce at the newly founded Bartow County College and Career Academy (BCCCA).

The county places emphasis on partnerships, especially with the City of Cartersville, and applies this collaborative approach to economic development initiatives. Bartow County operates with a budget of \$112 million. The county has only one commissioner — one of only 11 counties in the U.S. with this structure — who works closely with the City of Cartersville council and mayor. For economic development, the county and the city created the Bartow-Cartersville Joint Development Authority (BCJDA) that does business as the Cartersville-Bartow County Department of Economic Development (Cartersville-Bartow County DED). The department, staffed by three employees, is equally funded by the city and the county and handles the day-to-day responsibilities of managing economic development projects, maintaining relationships with existing industries and coordinating efforts with several organizations.

### Highland75

Highland75 is a 782 plus acre industrial park built in 2012 that targets to bring the corporate headquarters of new firms to the area in advanced manufacturing, research and development and logistics. In 2004, the City of Cartersville and Bartow County decided to pool their resources for economic development initiatives and began planning for Highland75. DED manages the park and can provide tax abatements and land subsidies for attracting companies that would enhance the manufacturing base of the county economy and bring good paying jobs for county residents.

- Population, 2013: 101,273
- County Board size: 1
- County Administrator

# STRONG ECONOMIES, RESILIENT COUNTIES

The Role of Counties in Economic Development



NACo WHY COUNTIES MATTER PAPER SERIES • ISSUE 1 • July 2014 • [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org)

The development of the industrial park was not without challenges, but the county, in partnership with the city, state and others, overcame these barriers. When Cartersville-Bartow County DED was examining the selected site for the park, the owners of neighboring properties expressed concerns over potential low wage levels and environmental pollution from firms moving into the industrial park. Cartersville-Bartow County DED worked with the residents on disseminating and clarifying their recruitment priorities focused on high value-added businesses. The park was finalized around 2008, at the start of the global economic downturn, which made client recruitment more challenging. On a trade mission to Austria in 2011, the Governor of Georgia met with representatives from Voestalpine, a large steel-based technology company looking to expand their operations in the United States. A year later, Voestalpine decided to construct a facility at Highland75, making it the first facility at the park. The construction of the \$62 million facility began in 2012 and will provide 220 jobs when the construction phases are complete. As of 2014, there are about 40 employees on-site. A new addition to the park is Surya, a carpet manufacturing company that announced in June 2014 that it would open a corporate office and distribution facility in Highland75. Surya is expected to invest \$30 million in the new facility and create 200 new jobs. With a growing list of interested parties, the Cartersville-Bartow County DED hopes to have all 782 acres committed in the next several years.

## Bartow County College and Career Academy

Bartow County jointly developed a program with the Bartow County School System to prepare students for the skills needed for high value added businesses. The Bartow County College and Career Academy (BCCCA) provides training for high school students in a variety of areas such as manufacturing, health care and engineering. BCCCA enrolls students regardless of whether the student plans to join the workforce immediately following high school or plans to attend a post-secondary school.

BCCCA intends to increase



Bartow County College and Career Academy opening in fall 2013.

# STRONG ECONOMIES, RESILIENT COUNTIES

The Role of Counties in Economic Development



NACo WHY COUNTIES MATTER PAPER SERIES • ISSUE 1 • July 2014 • [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org)

graduation rates and create a more skilled local workforce through focused programs. Two hundred and forty (240) students enrolled in the inaugural class in the fall of 2013. Students can choose several paths available through BCCCA, including dual college enrollment — allowing students to enroll in college courses while still in high school — internships, job shadowing and even job-specific training. In the inaugural class, 24 students participated in dual enrollment with the local community college, earning 6 hours of college credit each semester. Several students were placed in internships, including two at the Chamber of Commerce. Students in certain healthcare classes received 40 hours of hands-on experience throughout the semester: 20 hours at a local hospital and 20 hours at a nursing home.

The creation of this training program is the culmination of 10 years of discussions, preparation and planning among a large group of local stakeholders. More than 100 county officials, city officials, local business leaders and school principals participated in the debate around the adequacy of the local workforce and the needed solutions. In 2010, the Cartersville-Bartow County DED conducted a workforce needs-assessment survey, including employers' expectations regarding workforce challenges both present and future. The study found the high school graduation rate in Bartow County was 69 percent. Only 30 percent of high school graduates enrolled in a post-secondary school and less than half completed their degree program. As a result, only 10 percent of local high school students were completing a post-secondary degree. Companies emphasized the need for qualified new workers. For example, one company was facing an aging workforce with about half of the employees eligible to retire, but without the possibility to replace them with the available local workforce.

BCCCA has a lot of potential. The program aims to create a high-skilled workforce and increase graduation rates. The current programs offered by the BCCCA are the result of community collaboration with the county, the local chamber of commerce, the school board, local businesses and colleges. BCCCA received positive feedback from participating companies and expects that once companies see the benefits of the program, both to themselves and their community, more prospects will be available to the students. Finally, the BCCCA received a one-time \$3.4 million grant from the state in 2012, but it must continually seek additional resources. With the enrollment for the 2014-2015 school year expected to double, the BCCCA is seeking more business partnerships, funding and opportunities for the students.

Bartow County worked in partnership with the city and other local stakeholders to address the income challenges and grow the local economy. Building on the historical strength of the local manufacturing sector, the county initiated an industrial park (Highland75) and a workforce-training program for students (the BCCCA). The collaborative process that led to their formation will create a community-focused, sustainable future for the programs.