

## Growing Smart: Economics in Houston County Communities

### *Where are we now?*

- The service industry is the largest employment sector within Houston County.
- Almost half (47.3%) of the county's jobs are service-oriented in nature. Out of the service sector, retail trade and food services are the largest employers at 11.4% and 10.1% respectively.
- The second largest sector is government employment (41.4%). The vast majority (26.1%) of these jobs are concentrated in federal government employment.
- Manufacturing industries make up the third largest employment sector(8.3%).
- These three sectors- service, government, and manufacturing industry- account for 97% of all employment within Houston County.
- Projections indicate that these same three economic sectors will continue to provide the bulk of employment in Houston County over the next two decades.
- The county's high percentage of federal government employment can be attributed primarily to the presence of Robins Air Force Base (RAFB).
- RAFB is the single largest industrial complex in the State of Georgia and by far the largest single employer in Houston County.
- RAFB has successfully navigated the recently completed Department of Defense Base Realignment and Closure activities.
- Employees commute to Houston County from within and outside the region and as far away as the Atlanta area. 70% of these do live in Houston County.
- The mean travel time for Houston County workers in 2000 was 20.2 minutes.
- Houston County average annual unemployment rate is below state and national average. This proves a mixed blessing. Low unemployment rate can equate to a low labor availability base which can sometimes hamper economic growth opportunities.
- The average weekly wage is lower in Houston County (\$664) than the state average (\$728).

- The highest average weekly wages are in transportation equipment, fabricated metal production, public utilities, federal employment, scientific/technical services, and nonmetallic mineral product manufacturing.
- Retail trade and accommodation and food services comprise the highest percent of employment within the service producing sector in Houston County (11.4% and 10.1% respectively). These jobs are characterized by having some of the lowest average weekly wages in the county.

### ***What do we have?***

- The local, regional, and state economic development resources available to both businesses and residents in Houston County are many and varied.
- The support programs are positive attributes available to community leaders and economic development professionals to use to their advantage when seeking to recruit new industries to the county.
- In addition to identified state, regional and local Economic Development Agencies, available programmatic economic tools include Freeport exemptions and business development funds.
- The communities of Houston County are fortunate to host a diverse selection of outstanding educational opportunities available to meet the needs of employers, workers and students at every level.

### ***Where are we going?***

- Projections predict modest declines in government employment for Houston County from 2000 through 2030 (from 38.82% to 28.26%). Manufacturing jobs are also projected to decline from 6.19% in 2000 to 4.97% in 2030.
- During this same period of time the percentage of jobs in services is projected to grow from 22.82% to 34.58%.

### *What do we want?*

- With the recent release of the 2005 BRAC recommendations, and the news that **Robins Air Force Base is slated to grow** as a result of realignment, the Base can now serve as a catalyst for future economic growth and development.
- The Base can be used as a stimulus for the development of an **aerospace support cluster group**.
- Houston County is also seeking to **diversify its economy**. It can be argued that Houston County's most pressing economic development need is diversification of the local economy.
- A recently completed **Economic Diversification Strategy** has identified the top most viable potential industry candidates as
  - **Healthcare;**
  - **Tourism;**
  - **Trucking, Warehousing, and Distribution;**
  - **Retirement Industry Development; and**
  - **Recruitment of State Agencies**
- Successful implementation of the Economic Diversification Strategy will require active and committed initiative on the part of local business and government leaders.

### *How do we get there?*

- Identified high priority economic development projects include:
  - **Trucking, Warehousing, & Distribution;**
  - **Retirement Industry Development;**
  - **I-75 Corridor Commercial and Industrial Development;**
  - **Aerospace Industry Development;**
  - **Development and implementation of Regional Heritage Tourism Program**
  - **Increase Surface Transportation Capacity;**
  - **Acquire and Develop Publicly-Owned Industrial Sites;**

- **Infrastructure Improvements to Perry/Houston County Airport and environs;**
- **Develop Warner Robins Conference Center;**
- **Undertake Wastewater System Improvement Projects.**