

For Immediate Release
January 4, 2007
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Development Authority Taking Action To Attract, Retain Jobs In Dublin and Laurens County

Economic development leaders in Dublin and Laurens County are about to take a new approach to attracting and retaining jobs thanks to new investments by city and county governments. A marketing campaign, target market research and a survey of existing companies are all components to the new plan implemented recently by the City of Dublin County of Laurens Development Authority.

"As the business of economic development has become increasingly competitive, it therefore dictates changes that we must make as a development authority," according to Roger Folsom, chair of the authority. "Our goal is to be one of the best places in the world to locate and expand a business. To accomplish this goal, we must make some fundamental changes in our organizational structure as well as implement the strategic plan we have developed."

Authority members presented the need for additional funding to the City of Dublin and Laurens County Board of Commissioners last quarter. Both governments unanimously approved \$150,000 each over the next three years to fund the new initiatives of the authority.

"The city and county appointed the members of the authority to attract and retain jobs in this community and increase the tax base," according to Folsom. "We take our role seriously and are grateful the government leaders have the confidence in our decisions to take a new approach to

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economic development. What this shows is the forward thinking we have in the elected leadership.”

Last month the authority approved two contracts with firms who specialize in economic development marketing and research. The contracts, amounting to \$140,000, will produce two significant components of the new economic development plan for the community. Whittaker Associates, Inc., based in Holland, Michigan, will begin working with the economic development group this month on target market research. The results will be 400 “active leads” of companies over the next two years who match the criteria established by the authority. The companies identified will be shared in target sectors such as warehousing, distribution and healthcare industries.

Once leads have been established, the marketing plan will be implemented. AngelouEconomics, an economic development research and marketing firm based in Austin, Texas, has been hired by the authority to design and launch various aspects of a campaign focusing on Dublin and Laurens County.

“In today’s economic development arena, most prospects visit our community through the world wide web,” says Ms. Willie Paulk, executive director of the authority. “Many times we are eliminated from the active list of a client before we know we are being considered. One of the pieces of a successful marketing campaign is a strong website. The site can make a significant difference in how our community is viewed at first glance.”

Other marketing items may include collateral materials such as compact disk presentations and printed pieces. A major part of the campaign is developing the brand for the community to be used by the authority and other entities as well, such as governments and businesses.

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“A marketing advisory committee has given the authority great insight into how a successful campaign can improve the brand of our community,” says Jimmy Allgood, a member of the authority and chair of the advisory committee. “There are over a dozen marketing experts in our community who have shared their talents and ideas with us over the past four months. We are building a strong team that will enhance our efforts tremendously. The authority plans to continue engaging these local professionals in the process.”

Marketing to new businesses is just one of the new approaches underway for the authority. Working with existing industries is just as important, according to Paulk. A survey of existing company leaders in the Dublin area was completed last month. The results will provide valuable dialogue into how authority and chamber of commerce leaders can meet and exceed the needs of companies who are already a part of the landscape today. A qualified and educated workforce remains at the top of the list. Other issues include transportation access and a comfortable quality of life for citizens.

The authority began “re-tooling” in May of 2006 with the development of a strategic plan. The plan has specific goals and accountability factors to move the process forward over the next few years. Other appointed members of the authority include Guy Cochran, Jim Hammock, James Malone, Walter McCall, and Kathy Sweat.

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