

Marketing a neighborhood

Gwinnett Place CID launches new website for merchants

by Joel Furfari

The screenshot shows the homepage of VisitGwinnettPlace.com. At the top, it says 'Welcome to the Gwinnett Place CID Business Directory'. Below this is a search bar with a 'Search' button. To the right, there's a 'News and Information' section with a 'View all news' link. The main content area is a grid of business categories, each with a list of businesses and their phone numbers. Categories include Automotive, Food & Beverage, Retail & Services, Health & Wellness, Home & Garden, and Personal Products & Services.

In one of the more interesting approaches to promoting local stores and businesses, the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District has launched a new website, VisitGwinnettPlace.com, that it hopes will promote the area as a consumer destination.

But instead of just putting up a website with some pictures of the Pleasant Hill Road corridor and encouraging shoppers to come over, the CID plans to use the site as a central database of information about even the smallest businesses in the area.

Joe Allen, the CID's executive director, says the idea for the website came as the group wanted a way to incorporate all the different types of businesses in the district into a centralized online portal.

The group began planning the new site three months ago with its seven-member board of directors. The CID will continue updating its traditional website, GwinnettPlaceCID.com.

"Several business owners on the board of directors were talking about greater ways to involve business owners during the holiday season because we know it was going to be an extremely difficult season this year," he says.

The concept is straightforward, yet doing the actual legwork to build a directory site that lists every business in the Gwinnett Place CID wasn't simple. First the CID's small staff had to find out which businesses were operating. Then they came up with ways for those businesses to publish information on the site and even

post coupons for shoppers.

"We wanted to set up a one-stop shop because there's really no central database with all the hundreds of shops that are located here in the CID," Allen says.

Dave Rosselle, director of operations for the CID, has the ongoing job of doing the legwork to keep its business directory up to date. It's a daunting task.

"I would say we've got close to 800 businesses or more in the Gwinnett Place CID itself," Allen says. "I think Dave did a count recently and he's right at 775, but he said he's adding more and more every day."

Allen says one of the Pleasant Hill corridor's most appealing qualities is the sheer diversity of stores there. Instead of driving all over town, customers can find everything they need in the Gwinnett Place district.

In a few months, the CID plans for the site to include an interactive map and other details specific to the businesses and services of district property owners.

The next step for the CID is to encourage businesses to use the site as a free marketing tool. The CID's staff hosted a meeting recently at Gwinnett Place Mall.

"There's no business association that serves this area, so this could be a tool for us to reach businesses and bring them all together better," Allen says. "If we can all work together, share information and promote a positive perspective on this area, we all benefit."