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Helping people dream

by Christopher Lancellotti

Gwinnett Place CID leads next generation of development efforts

[Ed. Note: This is the third article of a series that examines the impact Gwinnett's three Community Improvement Districts (CIDs) are making on the county's business environment.]

Joe Allen still remembers what part of the Pleasant Hill Road area looked like when he was a kid. "This was a truck stop, a Waffle House and a mobile home park," he recalls. He wished for more.

Several decades later, Allen is now the executive director of the Gwinnett Place CID - an organization seeking to create a hometown feel for commercial property and business owners, workers, and even residents.

"Our top goals are to give people a sense of community, enhance transportation mobility and promote the long-term sustainability and viability of the area," he says, referring to the part of Gwinnett bounded by Old Norcross Road, Satellite Boulevard, Steve Reynolds Boulevard, Venture Drive and Crestwood Parkway. The district includes 191 commercial property owners with a combined property value exceeding \$500 million. "Everybody is in search of their own Mayberry. They're looking for that. They're hungry for it. As a CID, we can help people dream how they want their town to be."

Speaking as if the famous melody of the Andy Griffith Show were playing in the background, Allen



shares his own vision for the Gwinnett Place neighborhood.

It starts with simple yet important short-term goals such as bringing in sidewalks. Those along Venture Parkway and Crestwood Parkway are already finished, with Market Street next up on the list. The new footpaths will enable people to stroll from office complexes and hotels to restaurants and night clubs. The Gwinnett Place CID is also in the process of building its first "gateway" monument at the intersection of Commerce Avenue and Satellite Boulevard - giving drivers and pedestrians a clear indication they have entered a specific community. Next year, the CID plans to install network of "way-finding signs" pointing people to specific destinations so that they may navigate more easily.

The Gwinnett Place CID is working on a host of street improvement initiatives that involve everything from removing trash and graffiti to installing pedestrian and street lights, decorative mast arms, benches, bike racks, bus shelters and intersection plazas. It's also working with various government agencies to relieve traffic congestion by coordinating stoplights along Pleasant Hill Road and Satellite Boulevard through the installation/upgrading of fiber optic cable and CCTV systems for the visual monitoring along the corridors and at major intersections.

The CID has even saved a 200-year-old tree that rests at the edge of a cemetery next to Interstate 85 along the Pleasant Hill Road ramp.

The key to the organization's success at providing projects benefiting the commercial property owners' economic vitality is building partnerships among public and private entities - as is true with the county's other two CIDs.



"We want to coordinate with all the various players," Allen says. "We want to join developers, the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce, county and state agencies and departments, and retail owners, and look at development issues here. Let's look at this over a long-term and create a plan for the next steps in the evolution of the Gwinnett Place area."

It's working, according to Gwinnett Place Mall General Manager Scott Rolston.

"The CID has been working to create a better image so that the image our customers have when they're coming and going is positive," Rolston says. "Overall, I've seen a lot of positive things happening because of what the CID is doing."

Gwinnett Place CID Operations Director Dave Rosselle says the organization still has many more accomplishments on the agenda, such as a redevelopment study that will identify needed

improvements and ideas for the future. The plan will incorporate issues relating to infrastructure, land use, transportation, sewage capacity and the environment.

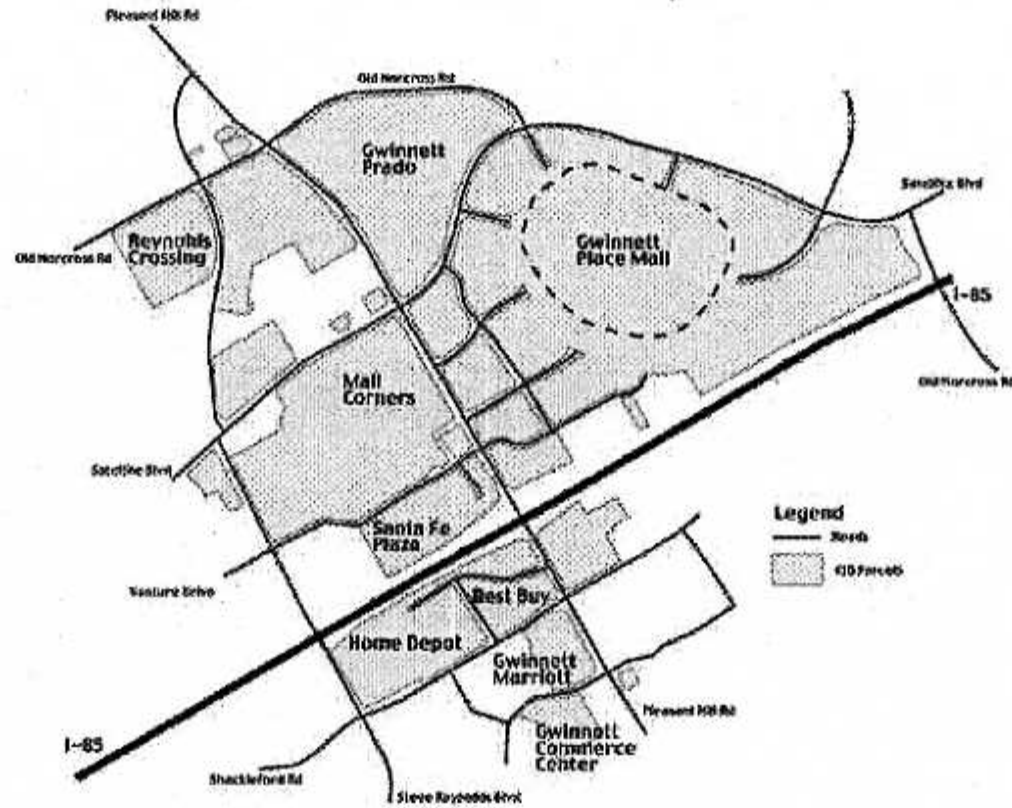
It will also examine the role to be played by projects such as the proposed high rise shopping, dining and entertainment complex to be built by the Yamasaki company, Wayne Mason's Global Village development, and George Thorndike's five-story office tower. These projects will bring in the district's first sizeable residential element.


"We're excited about the residential component," Allen says. "No one lives here. They come here to work and shop but they don't have a stake in what happens after work. We want to change that."

Longer term, the CID hopes to facilitate construction of a new ramp along I-85 and Highway 316 that will allow motorists another access point into the area without having to exit/enter solely on Pleasant Hill Road. It is also seeking to reconstruct the existing Pleasant Hill Road bridge and work on a multi-modal bridge connecting Breckinridge Boulevard and Venture Drive in order to provide additional ways for visitors to cross the I-85 gulf. Refuge islands are also on the drawing board for Pleasant Hill Road - giving pedestrians a safe haven as they cross the road.

"All of these projects represent the second evolution of this area," Allen says, the background music resonating again. "Through our business connections, we can help people dream."

Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District



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