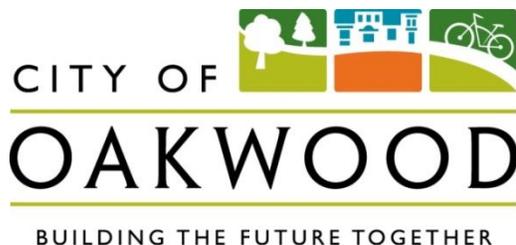


MAYOR
Lamar Scroggs

CITY COUNCIL
Martha Collins
Sam Evans
Montie Robinson, Sr.
Todd Wilson



CITY MANAGER
Stan Brown

CITY CLERK
Tangee Puckett

NEWS ARTICLE: Gainesville Times on September 13, 2015

Oakwood rides wave of commercial expansion

City officials attribute success to planning, infrastructure

Been to Oakwood lately?

Especially for longtime Hall County residents, it's a sight to behold. There's a new car dealership — Milton Martin Toyota — opening this month. Both QuikTrip and RaceTrac have both undergone recent overhauls, new Wendy's and Cook Out restaurants are opening soon and several manufacturers are in the process of big expansions.

Considering it used to boast little more than a community college and a couple fast food joints, the city in southern Hall County seems to have come a long way in the past couple decades.

It started with sewer, said City Manager Stan Brown.

"It all started back in the '80s," Brown said. "The council and mayor made the decision to try and get sewer down here. They worked with the city of Gainesville and were able to get sewer lines installed in the Mundy Mill Road area, and that led to a lot of the growth you see today. If not for sewer, none of it would have happened."

Brown said the "vision came from our city officials."

Oakwood Mayor Lamar Scroggs, who used to commute every day to work in Atlanta, said he always wondered "Why in the world do we have to drive so far south just to find a decent job? It evolved from that kind of thinking. You have to have a dream. You have to visualize the plan."

Now, Scroggs said, there's thousands of jobs to choose from in his city.

"If you drive through the parking lots of some of these manufacturers, you'll see auto tags from Gwinnett, Forsyth, Dawson, Lumpkin ... a lot of people come here now instead of driving to Atlanta to find work," Scroggs said.

Tim Evans, vice president of economic development with the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce, said it's "impressive" the variety of businesses as well as the many countries of origin one can find in Oakwood

"If you go down Rafe Banks Drive, on just that one street, you'll see companies from Italy, Japan, Germany, Czech Republic and Korea ... and Hawaii, too," Evans said. "It really is amazing."

Rafe Banks Drive is part of Oakwood South Industrial Park, which Brown said was “a leap of faith” back in the late '90s.

“We acquired the land and built the infrastructure,” Brown said. “It has led to a nearly complete buildout of the area ... all of it attributed to the city stepping up and realizing a vision for that land.”

Brown said “being a streamlined operation in Oakwood” has also helped attract business.

“When it comes to development, you don’t have a lot of bureaucracy to go through,” he said. “It’s basically just me and the building inspector.”

He also said the municipality’s location hasn’t hurt.

“We’re blessed to be close to the interstate, the lake and the railroad, so geography has been very good to us,” Brown said.

A true business city, Oakwood’s tax base is 86 percent commercial industrial. With about 4,500 people living there, Oakwood has more jobs than it does residents.

And the jobs keep coming. PFG Milton’s, a food service company, is expanding. Jinsung, which manufactures equipment for Caterpillar, is expanding. And King’s Hawaiian recently added a second plant at its local facility.

Brown said if you go back far enough you can trace it to the decision in the '80s to put sewer lines in.

“It was a huge investment,” Brown said. “But, based on that foresight, it’s set the stage for where we are today.”