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Economy in Oakwood on upswing

Businesses opening and thriving on Mundy Mill



Dr. Scott DeLong performs a check-up Tuesday on Calie, a 7-year-old Great Dane, with the assistance of registered veterinarian technician Cindy Jackson at the Chestnut Mountain Animal Hospital on Winder Highway. The animal hospital, which opened in November 2010, is just one of several businesses opening in the Oakwood area. open another location in Gainesville sometime this year.

The economy seems to be picking up along Mundy Mill Road in Oakwood after a few years of businesses opening and closing or suffering because of the flailing economy and a major road project.

Since the end of 2010, more than a handful of businesses have opened or are gearing up to open along the four-lane road, a main artery in South Hall County, particularly between Walmart/Gainesville State College and Martin Road.

Among the new establishments are restaurants, a dental office, fitness center, tanning salon and cell phone shop. A Dunkin' Donuts is set to open in April, and the franchise owner said he has plans to

Dr. Scott DeLong of Chestnut Mountain Animal Hospital said he was practicing in Cobb County and wanted to move closer to family in Gainesville and Watkinsville.

His father pointed him to Mundy Mill Road, noting the area's growth over the past few years.

The area has seen much change, including \$75 million in road improvements at Ga. 53/Mundy Mill Road and Interstate 985. In another road project, the state Department of Transportation widened Ga. 53/Winder Highway between Atlanta Highway and Ga. 211/Old Winder Highway.

DeLong likes his location.

"Between the Kroger (shopping center on Winder Highway) and a few neighborhoods right around the area, plus vetwise, going east, unless you're going down (Ga.) 211, there's nothing until you cross over I-85," he said.

Jill Schenden, a co-owner of Beyond Bronze Tanning Boutique, which is set to open Saturday, said she and other principals in the business chose their location because of the high traffic generated by neighboring Walmart and the strip center where the business is housed.

"Even at 9 p.m., it is extremely populated," she said.

As area residents, they have noticed much change and growth in the area.

Driving by the Kroger center recently, "I was just amazed at what has popped up in that area," Schenden said. "I remember when there was absolutely nothing along there."

City Manager Stan Brown said he is happy to see some development happening in the city.

"It's good to at least see some permits issued and some work going on," he said.

Adding more promise to the area's economy is an emerging sewer project.

In a \$2.1 million project, Oakwood is installing a force main line to Jackson County, connecting with the Braselton sewer system. In a separate job related to the same project, work is under way on a \$1.1 million pump station on Martin Road, off Winder Highway.

Ultimately, as part of an agreement between the two cities, Oakwood would receive as much as 2.5 million gallons per day in sewer capacity from Braselton.

"We're well under construction with the force main and we expect that to be completed by late summer," Brown said. "Braselton is in the process to bid out their (part of) the project. Probably, it'll be sometime in 2012 when we'll be diverting flows to Braselton."

He said he believes the project will benefit all of South Hall, "to encourage a lot better development" of the area.