

Overview

The mission of the Gwinnett Environmental & Heritage Center (GEHC) is to serve as a recreational catalyst for:

- Inspiring and engaging community involvement in educating Gwinnett's students to solve tomorrow's environmental challenges;
- Promoting sustainable development practices;
- Utilizing new technologies to preserve the future health of our water resources;
- Enhancing the appreciation of Gwinnett's natural and passive recreational resources; and
- Presenting the interaction and interrelationships of lifestyles and cultures – past, present and future – as they relate to the living world around us.

Core Services

GEHC offers a wide array of affordable sustainable design strategies, natural resource management, environmental programming for science and nature, required federal regulatory NPDES permits, passive recreation, cultural exploration, and rental opportunities for all sectors of Gwinnett's population. The Center's programs are designed to recover cost and be cost neutral to the budget. Program development is designed around hands-on, learn by doing interactive exhibits for youth to senior adult audiences. GEHC blends indoor and outdoor classroom space, exterior landscapes and exhibits, a museum collection of permanent and rotating exhibits/displays, and interpretive learning opportunities. Exhibits and programs meet academic requirements of the state of Georgia and Gwinnett County's Academic Knowledge & Skills curriculum thus supporting a wide range of opportunities. The site offers a unique natural experience for the urban family in that it features a river and several streams, constructed wetlands, a forested amphitheater, council rings for small groups, covered pavilions, diverse native plant communities, and a greenway with over 10-miles of trails for passive recreation activities such as hiking, biking, and jogging. At present, the current philosophy of Gwinnett County Government is not to charge fees for passive recreation/park operations or parking, therefore, the intent of the facility operations is not to make a profit or be 100% cost recoverable.

An important tool for any organization is the ability to identify and divide its potential markets into groups or clusters of people with similar lifestyle interests. These groups or clusters become very useful to agencies when they are trying to identify specific market niches or venues for the purpose of promoting their

services and programs to the public. The programming developed at GEHC is specific to that business plan and therefore falls outside of the operating criteria of the Gwinnett County Public School System (GCPS) and the University of Georgia (UGA). For example the annual operating cost for a GCPS student is \$8,000.00. The total tuition cost for an academic year at the University of Georgia is \$18,000.00. Because program development at GEHC is designed to meet its core mission target audiences, GEHC is able to offer affordable student visits for \$7.00 and residence admissions for \$7.50. Because of the extensive work that has been done to not replicate or duplicate the same level of services as cited by the aforementioned agencies (GCPS, UGA) GEHC's field studies and programming are designed to enhance the visitors' experience through existing partnerships that have been developed through intergovernmental agreements that complement and engage Gwinnett students and the community at large so that all Gwinnett citizens receive a unique benefit. It should be noted that non-residents are charged higher fees and therefore add to the profit margin of the program contact hours. Changing this business plan at this critical point of facility success would be disastrous to all of the highly successful existing and emerging partnerships and damage funding opportunities that exist and are underway.

Public/Private Partnerships

GEHC is a unique and important contributor in making Gwinnett County a desirable place to live, work, and play. More importantly, it allows Gwinnett to promote itself as a balanced community and further its ability to attract corporate America. Therefore, the Center is assisting in and enhancing the Gwinnett County Chamber of Commerce's mission "to be a leader in creating, promoting, and sustaining a responsible pro-business environment in Gwinnett County." Indirectly the Center assists Gwinnett County Government's economic development efforts, too. Before opening its doors in 2006, the business plan for the Center included a strong public/private collaborative base. GEHC brought key players to the table in its mission to transform the concepts of science, cultural/history, and recreation into interactive, interpretative, and hands-on experiences. Those partnerships include the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners, the Gwinnett County Public Schools, the University of Georgia, the Gwinnett Environmental & Heritage Center Foundation (GEHC Foundation) and the business community.

Each partner contributes specific functions and responsibilities that make the Center's mission and operations a success. No one partner carries the full burden/load of the organization. This plan has been extremely successful because its design is centered on a team approach. The Center's facility and grounds are owned, operated, and maintained by Gwinnett County. The County also provides funding for programming and administrative staff. Gwinnett County Public Schools provides funding for operations and two-teachers that assist in planning, coordinating, and teaching the Center's environmental and natural

resource management programming for the 44,000 plus Gwinnett students who attend and participate in field studies annually. This relationship allows for sustainable revenues and is modeled after successful programs that exist in other areas of the country – Jacksonville, FL, Denver, CO, Atlanta, GA, Virginia Beach, VA, etc. The University of Georgia provides funding for exhibits, operations, and two-adjunct instructors through the School of Environmental Design and School of Marine Science. Furthermore, the GEHC Foundation, which is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3), supports the Center’s operation and capital campaign needs by raising funds for its various programs, exhibits, and capital projects. It also serves as repository for volunteer services which aids in budget savings to the operating budget. To date more than 200 volunteers have contributed thousands of contact hours. Additionally, the business community has assisted greatly in the development of the Center. Their support, active engagement, and contributions have funded exhibits and programming specific to the mission of the Center.

Most notably, the GEHC Foundation is governed by a Board of Trustees composed of members from the business community. In a period of three years, the Foundation has raised more than \$330,000.00 in its efforts to assist the Center. The Foundation has also acquired assets and exhibits, such as the Chesser-Williams House, which contributes to the expansion of the Center’s heritage programming. Additionally, the Foundation funded the Rivers to Reef exhibit to aid in providing programming with respect to marine ecology. Furthermore, the GEHC Foundation has also taken a leadership role in applying for grants that have the potential to vastly increase revenues and aid in various educational initiatives that do not exist in the southeast region, thereby freeing its governmental partners to focus on other spending priorities. Within the next twelve months, the GEHC Foundation estimates it will have tenable funding for approximately \$1,000,000.00 in grants and sponsorships.

In short, the public/private partnership at the Center is working and growing. In a time when there is a need for collaboration between the business/corporate community, the philanthropic community, and government, the Center is not only a gift that encompasses all of these important “building blocks,” but it contributes to a balanced community, which helps make the fabric of Gwinnett County a great place to live and work for the culturally diverse populations that call Gwinnett home. The Gwinnett Environmental & Heritage Center will continue to build upon its successes and continue to bridge new relationships to further its mission, vision, and values.

Fiscal Overview

GEHC is a division of the Department of Community Services which provides high quality recreational, educational, electoral, health and human services in partnerships with the Gwinnett community. As noted in the aforementioned,

when programs are offered, cost factors must be taken into consideration before it is implemented.

To date, GEHC staff has pre-registrations of over 9,000 students in 2010 which equates to 36,000 contact hours. It is estimated that the academic year will exceed over 40,000 students. This effort will generate over \$260,000.00 and enhance funding opportunities. Additionally, 21 rental contracts have been signed for 2010 bringing a positive start to the New Year. Furthermore, I am pleased to report that GEHC met and exceeded its revenue target for FY 2009.

Revenues at GEHC are produced from the following sources – Pre-K-Adult programming (Public, private, home school, sustainable design, state and federal regulatory requirements, and required professional license recertification), facility rentals, special events, admissions, memberships, out-reach programs, mothers' morning out programs, birthday parties, summer camps, special need students, and scout (boy and girl) programs. Expenses are categorized similar to most businesses and are as follows - utilities, facilities and grounds maintenance, vehicles, outside private contractors/vendors, staff, office supplies, and equipment leases. Provided is a summary of revenues and expenses which provide a snapshot of GEHC's commitment to partnership development:

GEHC Fiscal Year 2010 General Fund

Expense	\$1,857,012
Revenue	\$292,300

Service Reductions – 2009 budget reductions included a 9% service reduction in community programming and proposed 2010 budget reductions include the elimination of one full-time administrative position.

Revenue contributions by on going partnerships are critical to the success of the Center. The following are a break down of these initiatives. It should be noted that these funds are both designated, undesignated, and grant funds, therefore, managing these gifts need careful oversight.

GCPS	\$150,000.00
UGA	\$70,000.00
GEHC Foundation	\$1,121,270.00*

*Includes multi-year commitments/corporate pledges

Benefits

The Gwinnett Environmental & Heritage Center is a multi-use cultural/heritage, recreational, science and technology, and environmental facility. It is located on a 700 acre campus with green space and walking trails, as well as a 59,000 square foot one of a kind sustainable design building. The Center is Gwinnett

County's first LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified green building. It is an active model of sustainable construction, featuring a one acre vegetated roof and numerous other innovative "green" design technologies.

The Center's campus is a real world living example, providing programming on energy, conservation, green development, heritage preservation and sustainability. More than 70,000 members of the community visit the Center annually and participate in some type of interpretative, hands-on activity that promotes effective management of the area's environmental resources. All segments of the community have access to the Center and its programming. These visitors include school groups (public, private, and home school), senior citizens, civic groups, the business community, college and university students, teachers, scouting organizations, families, and church/faith based groups.

In addition to the aforementioned programming, the Center provides an outlet for the arts and cultural awareness, which are important components of the County's 2030 Unified Plan. The Gwinnett Environmental & Heritage Center Foundation (GEHC Foundation) annually sponsors a fine art exhibit with corresponding environmental themes. Its continuing partnership with the Parent Teacher Association in the county has led to notable student art exhibits during the year. The current museum exhibits, the recently acquired historical assets and programming possibilities and the soon to be relocated Chesser-Williams House will enhance the community's understanding and appreciation of its past. The Center is a one-stop art, culture/history, and environmental experience that will touch of the lives of citizens from young to old.

The unique partnerships the Center maintains with Gwinnett County Public Schools, the University of Georgia, the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners, and the Gwinnett Environmental & Heritage Center Foundation allow for staffing, sustainable funding, and program resources that would not be available in a one member operation. The Center is recognized as a valued educational partner by local academic institutions because it provides an environment and programming that is unavailable in a traditional classroom or school campus/community setting. The building and the surrounding ecology are integral to the principals that the Center is able to instill and communicate with citizens and patrons.

For many Gwinnett youth, outdoor natural woodland activities are foreign concepts. Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*, coined the phrase "nature-deficit disorder" to help explain a disturbing trend wherein outdoor activities among American youth have all but disappeared. Perhaps the best way to re-introduce the natural world to our youth is to provide exposure to nature. The Center does this through passive recreation and involving nature in all programming. This focus on the outdoors helps promote healthy lifestyles and allows citizens to be good environmental

stewards and better prepares them to manage the complex issues related to natural resource management, conservation, and water supply.

The Center has become a destination that brings community participation to events such as Earth Day, Ella's Run, First Lego Robotics League, Georgia Master Gardner Volunteer Day, and others. These great events allow for numerous volunteer opportunities. In 2009, the Center recorded hundreds of volunteer hours, which were fulfilled by students to senior citizens. The Center is also able to support many different workforce development programs from supporting youth interns, counselors in training during summer camps, prisoner work force, special needs skill development and community service hour workers.

As acknowledgement of the Center's programming and green construction design spreads, it has become a must see resource for international and regional delegations visiting Georgia and Gwinnett as a part of their efforts to learn more about conservation, environmental impacts, sustainable design practices, and cultural/heritage experiences. This is blazing a new trail for eco-tourism in the county, and the Center has become Gwinnett's eco-destination. The direction is clear. If GEHC remains in its current public/private partnership, it will fulfill its mission to enrich the lives of all Gwinnett County citizens. If it become a for profit organization it runs the significant risk of excluding many citizens and becoming accessible only to those who can afford the admission price.