

CARROLL COUNTY MARKET REPORT

UWG a major engine for county's growth

BY RANDY SOUTHERLAND
Contributing Writer

After a half century of growth, the **University of West Georgia** has become a major engine for economic development in this region.

"When we work with the community we try to find opportunities that not only our students can benefit from, but that can benefit our business partners as well," said Faye McIntyre, dean and chair of Private Enterprise at the University of West Georgia's **Richards College of Business**.

One such collaboration is between the university's Richards College of Business and **Southwire Co. LLC**, the area's leading employer. The one of a kind Southwire Sustainable Business Honors Program (SSBHP) was launched to meet the growing demand for sustainability savvy managers. It pairs academics focused on sustainable business practices with real world internships throughout Southwire's organization.

"We wanted to develop future leaders for our company and we want to particularly develop leaders who have a broader view of success business success than is always the case," said Southwire CEO Stu Thorn.

Funded by a \$1.1 million grant from the company, the program has 15 students who will earn both bachelor's and master's degrees in four years. Being able to work at a company that is deeply committed to sustainable business practices adds an element to their education that is unique, according to McIntyre.

"We took a lot of time to develop this program so that it was something that our students would be able to have an opportunity second to none," she said. These students have created projects for the company in areas such as employee engagement, health and wellness and Southwire's 12 for Life cooperative education program for at-risk high school students.

"So they're getting a tremendous opportunity and their resumes will be killer when they come out," said McIntyre.

For Southwire the program is the latest of several community-oriented efforts geared to build a better community, while also creating a better educated more capable potential workforce.

"Being a private family-owned company we have a very broad sense of what it takes to be successful because we want to be successful for the next generation and sustain our success long term, not just do well in the next quarterly earnings report," said Thorn.

West Georgia is also home to one of the state's **Small Business Development Center**. The center offers assistance and expertise in helping an average of 200 businesses a year to solve a wide variety of business problems.

"Every client is different in their needs and expertise," said the center's director



University of West Georgia has a partnership that allows students to work as interns at Southwire Co. LLC.



PHOTOS/SPECIAL

Todd Anduze. "Some are just starting and may have anything from secretary of state questions to payroll questions. The more established businesses won't have that. They have their procedures in place. They may have employee issues. A lot of the bigger companies come to me with 'This is what I'm thinking about today.' 'I have a problem with an employee.' 'I'm trying to change my culture and I need some employee empowerment.'"

The university's **Center for Business and Economic Research** provides help to business seeking to know more about

the region and the potential for their businesses. It issues quarterly reports on the economic state of the West Georgia region.

Along with working with local business, the university has become a major driver for the area's economy with an economic impact last year of \$463 million – up more than \$40 million in just two years.

It's big business. The 645-acre campus with 2.2 million square feet of classrooms, offices and student facilities and residence halls is home to 12,806

► BY THE NUMBERS

THE UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA

- President: Kyle Marrero
- 1601 Maple St., Carrollton, Ga. 30118
- Enrollment: 12,806 (Fall 2015)
- Undergraduate: 10,500 students
- Graduate: 2,300 students
- Academics: 85 programs of study, 4 doctoral, 30 masters
- Other locations: The University of West Georgia - Newnan

students, a record fall enrollment. Some 3,300 live on campus with another 3,200 in apartments within a mile of the university.

"So it has a very traditional feel," said university President Kyle Marrero.

Those numbers will be even bigger when its Newnan campus opens this fall with 700 students. Officials predict there will be more than 3,000 there within four years and the university will be educating more than 15,000 in total.

The university's proximity to Atlanta has allowed it to tap into a large potential student body – particularly those looking for an educational experience outside the busy metro area, according to Marrero.

"Our market capture is becoming greater and greater in the Atlanta area while other institutions in the state are seeing significant decline," he said.

With programs in nursing, teaching education and health sciences, the institution is meeting the needs of local business. In fact, a majority of teachers in the local area received one or all of their degrees from West Georgia.

Much of the university's enrollment growth has occurred during the last few years as it has stepped up marketing to overcome what has long been a notoriously low profile among the state's colleges.

Over the last eight years, it has poured more than \$300 million into expanding and modernizing the 50-year-old campus. Within the next years, officials want to put another \$22 million into constructing a new home for its popular biology department.

West Georgia's student population is expected to grow by 2 percent to 4 percent, but its online learning programs have grown even faster. These programs, popular among older adult students seeking to up their game at work, are up more than 400 percent. The program, which is a partnership with other state colleges, offers five degree programs entirely online. The program has been ranked as high as fourth best in the country by **U.S. News & World Report**.

"The interesting thing is we have this really traditional niche, but we're also considered a leader in delivering online innovative quality curriculums in a flexible way to that adult population," said Marrero.