

The Pulse of Progress

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What's Inside

- Higher Education in Atlanta: May Means Commencement
- Atlanta Arts and Culture
- Atlanta's Newcomers
- Atlanta's Vital Signs: Population
- Neighborhood of the Month: Virginia-Highland
- Upcoming Economic Development Events

Higher Education in Atlanta: May Means Commencement



One of Atlanta's biggest conventions comes to town this month - and every May, year after year. May is commencement season here in one of the nation's leading centers for higher education.

You might not think of higher ed as a tourist attraction, but Atlanta's 57 colleges and universities draw visitors for lots of reasons this time of year to celebrate the graduation of friends and family members. Atlanta ranks among the largest centers of higher education, according to the Atlanta Regional Council for Higher Education, which means lots of economic activity around graduation time.

At least 36,000 students will earn college degrees in the Atlanta region this year. The majority of those will be conferred in graduation ceremonies this month. For example, 2,850 will take their degrees Saturday at Georgia State and 3,500 at Emory Monday, while 2,300 received degrees last Saturday at Georgia Tech.

"Morehouse School of Medicine graduates about 65 healthcare and research professionals every year, but the commencement ceremony requires a 2,500-seat venue," said ARCHE President Michael A. Gerber. "People come from all over the country and the world to celebrate having a doctor in the family - and they're likely to stay for a while to enjoy Atlanta."

Hotels, restaurants, attractions and airlines all feel the impact of these campus visits, which add up to a major economic impact. An ARCHE report details 5.7 million annual visits to the Atlanta region for colleges and universities - including 1.5 million overnight stays. They come for admissions and alumni visits, arts and athletic events, and academic seminars and conferences. In all, ARCHE puts the impact at \$469 million in in-state spending generated each year by campus visitors.

Watch for new higher ed stats later this month as ARCHE releases a new report measuring and ranking "Higher Education in American Metropolitan Areas."



Atlanta Arts and Culture



The Atlanta Ballet teamed up with OutKast's Big Boi this spring for "big" - a production combining classical ballet and hip-hop.

The nonprofit arts and culture industry is a significant economic engine in America, generating \$166.2 billion in 2006 – a 24 percent increase since 2001, according to a recently released study. Atlanta's own cultural scene is an example of this national trend on a smaller scale.

A recent economic impact study done for the City of Atlanta by Americans for the Arts showed that nonprofit arts and culture are a \$274.8 million industry in the City, supporting 8,211 full-time jobs. Locally, the arts generate \$27.07 million in local and state government revenue and leverage a remarkable \$160.87 million into local restaurants, hotels, retail stores, parking garages and other businesses in the City of Atlanta. This shows that, contrary to popular belief, support for the arts and economic development can often go hand in hand.

From a business attraction and retention aspect, executives evaluate many facets that make cities attractive for businesses, including quality of life and cultural amenities – important attributes for attracting desirable employees. Major urban centers like Charlotte, Chicago, Denver, Seattle and Portland reference strong arts and cultural environments as a determining factor in the recruitment of new companies for the city. Arts and culture are magnets not only for residents, but for visitors as well.

Tourism research repeatedly shows that cultural travelers stay longer and spend more dollars. In fact, non-local audiences spend twice as much as their local counterparts.

The arts also have a significant impact on the quality of education, the overall success of students and their ability to stay in school. In a 2005 study of college-bound seniors, research showed that high school students who took arts classes had higher math and verbal SAT scores than students who did not. Specifically, students who took four years of arts classes outperformed their peers, on average, by 58 points on the verbal portion of the SAT and 38 points on the math portion.

The arts are a common denominator that can bridge gaps between cultures, races, generations, economics and beliefs, which, given the influx of new immigrants to the area, has a positive impact on the overall economy of the region. Yet, even though the region is culturally rich, with more than 450 cultural groups Atlanta falls woefully behind comparable communities in direct support to the arts. Atlanta's per capita public sector arts funding is a mere \$1.21 per person. When combined with Fulton County funding, the per capita figure jumps to \$3.75: still far below Denver at \$14.93; Charlotte/Mecklenburg at \$8.67; and Austin, Texas at \$9.50 per person.

Increasing public funding is an essential element in making arts attendance possible for the general public and maintaining high quality offerings. If metro Atlanta is to enhance its position as a national and international cultural destination, it must at a minimum become competitive with the level of support offered cities of comparable size.

A 2004 survey of Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton and Gwinnett Counties, undertaken by The Shapiro Group, found that:

- 73% of area residents believe arts and culture improve the quality of life in Atlanta.
- 63% believe arts and cultural events are important for attracting and keeping businesses.
- 84% of area residents believe arts and culture contribute the education and development of children.

Most important, the survey found that a majority of adults would be at least somewhat willing to pay a tax to support the arts.

The 2007 Mayor's Art and Culture Funding Task Force recommended that a minimum annual investment of \$10 million (\$21.25 per capita) is needed to enhance and increase access to the arts—not feasible in the short term given the City's current budget woes. In the long term, if Atlanta is to become a world-class cultural destination, it is imperative to secure a stable, significant, ongoing source of funding for the arts. Our support for and engagement with the arts helps to sustain institutions and create partnerships that form the foundation of our city's vibrant cultural life.

Atlanta's Newcomers

After decades of dwindling numbers, Atlanta has shown an increase in population in recent years. The most current IRS migration data (2005) show that, from 2000 to 2005, Atlanta's 20-county metro area had a net gain of about 270,000 residents. During that period, more than 33,000 people moved from out of state into Fulton County, which comprises the bulk of the City of Atlanta. Of the more than 205,000 metro-area residents who moved into Fulton County between 2000 and 2005, 84 percent came from Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb and Gwinnett Counties.

The City of Atlanta has been the beneficiary of many current trends in the way people move. One migration pattern is known as the "half-back effect" – this occurs when Northeastern retirees give Florida a try, find it doesn't suit them and move part of the way back north to Georgia, Tennessee and the Carolinas. Foreign immigration is another driver in Atlanta's population growth. While immigrants have historically settled in coastal regions, today more and more of them are choosing inland metropolitan areas where jobs are abundant. This has the added benefit of creating a more diverse city. Young, highly educated people are also moving south to Atlanta for jobs, but that's not all – they're drawn by the low cost of living, the diversity and the city's vibrant cultural life. Culture is an important factor in the last of these trends, known as urban revival. Spurning long commutes and seeking proximity to the cultural core of the city, people are leaving the suburbs and moving to the city center. These tend to be higher income empty-nester households; generally without children, these residents don't depend on the public school systems to dictate where they will live.

All of these newcomers change the demographic make-up of our city, bringing social, racial and economic diversity. Atlanta's average household income is on the rise, and the over-60 population is projected to double by the year 2030. Population data suggests that, in the city, there will be a greater need for housing for singles and couples without children in the future.

Atlanta's Vital Signs: Population

According to the U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates, the population has been growing steadily from 2000 to 2006 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 2.6%. During this period, the average population growth was 11,603 persons per year. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) in 2006, there are slightly more males than females. The age midpoint for the city is 35 years of age. Other City of Atlanta population characteristics from the 2006 ACS include the following:

- 40% of those 25 years and older have a bachelors degree or higher. The national average is 27%.
- Only 28% of males are married and 25% of females are married.
- 11% of Atlantans speak a language other than English at home. 8% are foreign-born, and 4.4% were born in Latin America.
- Commuting within the city isn't as bad as it is in the metro region – it takes 25.9 minutes on average to get to the office.

Year	Population	Change
2000	416,791	
2001	432,223	15,432
2002	441,446	9,223
2003	451,702	10,256
2004	463,093	11,391
2005	476,483	13,390
2006	486,411	9,928

CAGR 2.6%
Avg Change 11,603

Neighborhood of the Month: Virginia-Highland

Summerfest



VIRGINIA-HIGHLAND

Atlanta's Virginia-Highland community is already busy preparing for its 25th annual Summerfest, taking place June 6-8. Virginia-Highland is a historic district full of charming bungalow-style homes, many built in the early 20th century. The neighborhood, bounded on the north by Amsterdam Avenue, on the south by Ponce de Leon Avenue, on the east by Briarcliff Road, and on the west by the Southern Railroad Line, was incorporated into the City of Atlanta in 1912. Commerce began to develop around the intersection of Virginia and Highland Avenues, where the community gets its name, in the mid-1920s, following steady residential growth in earlier decades. Today, in addition to being one of the City's most sought-after addresses, Virginia-Highland is known as an in-town destination for shopping, dining and nightlife.

"The involvement of our residents, the architectural beauty of our homes and pedestrian-friendly commercial village is what sets Virginia-Highland apart from other communities in Atlanta," says Pamela Papner, Virginia-Highland Civic Association president and co-chair for this year's Summerfest. "Our residents are always willing get involved in order to improve our quality of life in Virginia-Highland."

The VHCA is a volunteer non-profit group that helps maintain the neighborhood by supporting schools, parks and other community amenities and taking on improvement projects. Currently VHCA is working on a residential preservation initiative to protect the unique architecture as well as a neighborhood commercial zoning initiative.

Summerfest takes place along tree-lined Virginia Avenue between North Highland Avenue and Park Drive. It features a juried artist market, food, live music, a 5K race and children's activities. Proceeds from the event go back into the community through VHCA. For more information, visit www.vahi.org/summerfest.html.

Upcoming Economic Development Events

May 14, **Bikefest.** 11 a.m.-2 p.m., Woodruff Park. Join the Atlanta Bicycle Campaign and the Downtown Transportation Management Association and meet cyclists, visit vendors and win prizes. For more information visit www.atlantadowntown.com.

May 14-15, **2008 Atlanta Construction Expo.** 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Georgia World Congress Center, Hall A2. Register free online when you visit <http://www.constructionexpo.com/cities/atlanta.htm>.

May 16-18, **Atlanta Downtown Festival and Tour.** The festival will include live entertainment, an artist market, a beer garden and more; the tour will feature lofts, condos and other unique living spaces in Downtown Atlanta. For more information visit www.atlantadna.org.

May 21, **SBA Emerging 200 Information Meeting.** 6:30-7:30 p.m., Auburn Avenue Research Library, 101 Auburn Ave. NE. Come find out how you can be one of 20 small business owners and executives chosen to receive intensive training through the U.S. Small Business Administration's e200 program. This training is geared toward growing businesses that are ready to step it up and is not recommended for start-up businesses. Come to the meeting for more information. Register online at www.sba.gov/ga: select "Registration for e200 meeting" under the "Spotlight" section.

May 23, **Atlanta Dream Home Kick Off Game.** 7:30 p.m., Philips Arena. For more information visit <http://www.wnba.com/dream/>.

May 24-26, **Atlanta Jazz Festival.** Woodruff Park. Celebrate Atlanta as a great cultural destination with the music of Atlanta-based jazz artists. No grilling, tents or pets are allowed. For more information visit www.atlantafestivals.com.

May 28, **Small Business Monthly Information Session.** 5 p.m. at the offices of the Atlanta Development Authority. To RSVP, send an e-mail to cbrackett@atlantada.com or call (404) 614-8295.

June 3-6, **GreenBusiness Works™ EXPO.** Georgia World Congress Center. For more information and to register online, visit www.greenbusinessworksexpo.net.

June 15-20, **International Microwave Symposium 2008.** Georgia World Congress Center. The IMS 2008 conference will feature a large trade show as well as a wide variety of technical papers and workshops. For more information visit www.ims2008.org.

June 25, **Small Business Monthly Information Session.** 5 p.m. at the offices of the Atlanta Development Authority. To RSVP, send an e-mail to cbrackett@atlantada.com or call (404) 614-8295.

June 29-July 1, **Americas Investment Conference.** Omni Hotel at CNN Center. AIC 2008 will focus on investing in the real estate, energy, and environmental sectors. For more information and to register online, visit www.aic08.com.

July 18-27, **National Black Arts Festival - 20th Anniversary Celebration.** For more information visit www.nbaf.org.

July 30, **Small Business Monthly Information Session.** 5 p.m. at the offices of the Atlanta Development Authority. To RSVP, send an e-mail to cbrackett@atlantada.com or call (404) 614-8295.

August 27, **Small Business Monthly Information Session.** 5 p.m. at the offices of the Atlanta Development Authority. To RSVP, send an e-mail to cbrackett@atlantada.com or call (404) 614-8295.

October 19-22, **IEDC Annual Conference: The Next Billion - Mobility, Flexibility, Agility, Livability.** Hyatt Regency Atlanta. For more information visit www.iedconline.org.

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