

*Case Study*

**Chamblee, Georgia:  
Home Grown Industries and the New Faces of the  
Entrepreneurs**  
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# Case Study

## **Overview Chamblee, Georgia: Home Grown Industries and the New Faces of the Entrepreneurs**

When Kodak and other Fortune 500 companies closed their plants in Chamblee, Georgia, it devastated the small city's economy. Chamblee began a process of "asset-based community development," but fell short of identifying its competitive advantage. The 1990 Census, however, revealed a unique asset - the large presence of hard-working, entrepreneurial immigrants and refugees. Nearly half of the residents in Chamblee were born outside of the United States.

The city's leadership began to galvanize towards pursuing international development strategies, corresponding with the ensuing 1996 Centennial Olympic Games and the general observation that Chamblee was becoming more international in character. In 1994, Chamblee created two districts -- the Central Business District and the International Village. The Central Business District was formed to support and protect the city's historic town center while promoting the nationally recognized "Antique Row." Chamblee created the International Village, a special redevelopment district surrounding its existing cluster of ethnically oriented businesses, to allow a mix of residential and commercial development within one zone.

Through the establishment of the village and related services, Chamblee has reinvented itself by successfully supporting new and existing entrepreneurs while, at the same time, creating a desirable place to live for individuals of diverse ethnic backgrounds.

## **Conditions Leading to the Practice**

Dating back to 1908, Chamblee's roots, like many southern communities, lie in dairies, railroads, and the military. During post-WWII, the small city captured significant industrial development by Frito-Lay, Kodak, and General Electric, which created a strong economic base for over three decades. By the end of the 1980s, however, Chamblee started experiencing the challenges associated with old industrial towns across the country -- e.g., plant closures and consequent job loss. At the same time, Chamblee's demographic character was changing rapidly.

In 1992, Ray Kemper, then-Vice President at the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce responsible for international business development, began to visit existing businesses in Chamblee and other communities in DeKalb County. Kemper observed Chamblee to have a significant cluster of small businesses owned by

foreign-born entrepreneurs, mostly from Asian countries. Confirming the observation that Chamblee was becoming more international in character was the 1990 Census, which indicated that nearly half of Chamblee's 7,860 residents were foreign-born. One of Chamblee's census tracts (212.04), with 4,115 residents, was revealed to be the most diverse tract in Georgia. The anticipation of the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games also inspired community leadership to "think international."

**Population by Racial Group in the City of Chamblee**

<b>Racial Group</b>	<b>Percent of Population</b>
<b>White</b>	53 percent
<b>Latin Americans</b>	23 percent
<b>African Americans</b>	18 percent
<b>Asians</b>	6 percent
Source: <i>Inc.</i> magazine. See "References."	

**Population by Racial Group in Census Tract 212.04, 1990**

<b>Racial Group</b>	<b>Percent of Population</b>
<b>Percent Minority*</b>	75.3 percent
<b>Percent Non-Hispanic White</b>	24.7 percent
*Minority includes Hispanic, Black, Asian, and Other Source: 1990 Census, as reported in International Village Community Development Task Force Report. See "References."	

Also in 1992, the Federal Justice Department launched a civil rights investigation based on comments about day laborers made by a Chamblee council member in a public meeting. The investigation brought considerable, mostly negative attention to Chamblee, but also had the effect of forcing community organizations to regroup and forge greater relationships with each other.

A third development occurred in 1993 that had a significant impact on the community's decision to create the International Village. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) created a grant program to fund the buyout of dilapidated residential properties in areas adjacent to airports. Consequently, the completed Peachtree DeKalb Airport Master Plan recommended that 101 acres north of the runway, wholly within the corporate limits of the City of Chamblee, be acquired for a runway protection zone (RPZ), noise abatement, and "neighborhood integrity" purposes. The FAA described the removal of homes from the RPZ as a "safety project" and therefore dictated that all cleared land would have to remain green space. Anything that attracted a large concentration of people (e.g., restaurants) would be prohibited.

The DeKalb Chamber of Commerce, with the help of community volunteers, became the driving force for the development of the International Village to include the "buyout area" (i.e., 101 acres) and surround the existing cluster of ethnically owned businesses. In 1992, Kemper created the International Village Task Force composed of community leaders. David Yu (Summit Bank), Bobby Brothers (Hanscomb Associates, Inc.), Jean Paddock (Georgia Power), Harry West (Atlanta Regional Commission), and Paige Perkins (then-board member of

the Refugee Women's Association of Metropolitan Atlanta)<sup>1</sup> led the volunteer effort. The community's leadership envisioned the International Village to be a mixed-use village that would allow both residential and commercial uses within one pedestrian knit area.<sup>2</sup>

The task force was structured into seven individual working groups - strategic planning, governance, leadership, marketing, finance, community development, and housing - that spent two years studying the International Village area and identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In addition to the task force, several other organizations developed analysis and ideas for the International Village, including Arthur Andersen & Company, Heery International, and the Community Design Center of Atlanta (in association with Georgia Tech's City Planning Department).<sup>3</sup> The conclusions of the task force groups and other organizations became the basis for the vision of the International Village that was later incorporated into the master plan.

## **Organization**

The City of Chamblee has managed the development of the International Village and the implementation of its master plan since 1994, and is responsible for architectural review and approval (through the International Village Design Review Board), permitting, zoning, and providing services to residents and business owners in the district. The Community Development Director is responsible for neighborhood preservation, economic development, and public relations within and around the International Village.

The DeKalb Chamber of Commerce continues to act as a liaison for the International Village to both public and private sector interests, as do ethnic-specific organizations such as the Mexican-American Chamber of Commerce and Chinese Lion's Club.

## **The Practice in Operation**

Creating the International Village - a place where people of varied ethnicity can live, work, and play together - has involved a community development process that extends beyond drafting a model in a design studio.

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<sup>1</sup> Paige Perkins has been Chamblee's Community Development Director since 1995 and has had an instrumental role in the development of the International Village. See "Practice in Operation."

<sup>2</sup> From 1992 to 1994, the drive to develop the International Village was spearheaded by the DeKalb Chamber and community leaders representing private, non-profit and civic interests. The City of Chamblee's direct involvement commenced with administrative personnel changes in 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Information based on "International Village Master Plan." See "References."

Insiders agree that the political climate of the early 1990s would not have allowed for such development. However, a massive overhaul of the Chamblee's administration in 1994 altered this climate significantly. A new city manager and chief of police were hired, and this new leadership viewed the development of the International Village as a positive step for Chamblee.

**Developing A Master Plan.** In May 1994, the City of Chamblee hired Comstar Real Estate Services and HOH Associates, Inc. to develop the first long-range master plan for the 394-acre International Village. Hanscomb Associates, Inc., Street Smarts, and Khafra Engineering Consultants were also part of the design team.<sup>4</sup> The Planning Advisory Team, consisting of board members representing Chamblee, DeKalb County, and the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce, was formed to assist, guide, and advise the design team.

A three-day public workshop was held in July 1994 and enjoyed participation from every sector of the community (e.g., residents, business owners, local government, etc.). The design team studied a variety of mixed-use development scenarios and settled on one that included single-family residential, multi-family residential, retail and general commercial, office and professional, quasi-public, light industrial, and transportation land use types<sup>5</sup> within a pedestrian-friendly environment. In August 1994, the Chamblee City Council adopted the entire master plan.<sup>6</sup>

**Zoning for Redevelopment.** Rezoning was a critical factor. Kemper and the task force recommended that two special overlay districts be created. In addition to the International Village, they called for the creation of the Central Business District (CBD) to protect the city's historic town center and government facilities. The newly elected city council supported the creation of two special districts to balance protecting the old and the new. As a result, rezoning legislation for both districts passed with relative ease in 1994. Chamblee's CBD boundaries were drawn around the city's cluster of antique stores ("Antique Row") and government buildings. The International Village boundaries were drawn around the existing cluster of ethnic businesses in the southeast section of the city and the "buyout area."

**Orchestrating the Buyout.** Chamblee, DeKalb County, and the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce have partnered to implement and seek funding for the buyout of 156 homes on the 101 acres in the Peachtree DeKalb Airport's runway protection zone. A delegation consisting of federally elected officials (Cynthia McKinney, Max Cleland, Paul Coverdell) has represented DeKalb County in discussions with FAA officials to structure the buyout. As of May 2000, the FAA

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<sup>4</sup>Information based on "International Village Master Plan." See "References."

<sup>5</sup> Emphasis was placed on residential development to account for the loss of 156 homes in the buyout area.

<sup>6</sup> The master plan was updated in 1999. The update involved revising certain sections of the master plan - mostly pertaining to the buyout area.

has provided the county with approximately \$22 million to help finance the buyout.<sup>7</sup>

There have been some challenges associated with the buyout. First, dislocated residents, not able to find alternative living arrangements in Chamblee, have had to relocate to outside communities. Second, some property owners have been reluctant to sell. Third, in the midst of the process, the FAA changed one of its key rules by permitting commercial property, or 30 businesses, to remain in the buyout area. These factors have made it difficult to proceed with the master plan in the buyout area.

In November 1999, the International Village master plan was updated and provided alternate development options for the buyout area - open space / public park versus golf course - both of which are under evaluation.

**Creating the International Village Cultural and Community Center (IVCCC).** The International Village Cultural and Community Center (IVCCC) is a two-phase project managed by a non-profit board of directors. Leaders representing the City of Chamblee, DeKalb Chamber of Commerce, and other community organizations are key partners and represented on the IVCCC board of directors. The project consists of (1) building a childcare center (Sheltering Arms) and (2) building a multi-purpose center to house civic organizations.

To implement Phase I, IVCCC board members David Yu (Summit Bank) and Jack Halpern (Halpern Enterprises, Inc.) led a fundraising effort. Sheltering Arms joined the IVCCC not as a tenant but as a partner, assuming the lease on the property for the childcare center and assisting with the fundraising effort.

**Harvesting Home Grown Industries.** In 1995, the city decided it needed to leverage its key asset - the large presence of hard-working, entrepreneurial immigrants and refugees - and created the Community Development office, with an operating budget of less than \$20,000, and hired Perkins as its director. Perkins explains that the city realized these residents, by their nature, are risk takers, leaving behind their home country to start a new life in Chamblee.

Also in 1995, Summit National Bank, the community's Asian Banking Center with a previous track record in financing Chinese-owned businesses, had constructed a new office building in the village. At the same time, Summit executives Pin Pin Chau and David Yu voiced their interest in investing in other ethnically owned businesses such as Latino-owned businesses. The bank has had a history in providing loans to ethnic business owners who were often turned down by other banks. However, many of Chamblee's potential business owners

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<sup>7</sup> Congresswoman McKinney's background in airport buyouts and relationship with Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater and Senator Cleland's position on the Senate Transportation Subcommittee have been viewed as instrumental in securing FAA funds.

(e.g., refugees and first-generation immigrants) did not understand the basics about seeking a loan and operating a business.

Working with ethnic chambers of commerce and associations, Perkins alerted existing and new entrepreneurs of the city's interest in providing them basic small business management and technical assistance services. Since 1995, Perkins has worked one-on-one with existing and new entrepreneurs. Following are examples of services provided.

- Prequalifying whether the prospective entrepreneur has the ability to operate the business of choice [Example: Someone who wants to open a restaurant should have significant experience in the food service industry.]
- Identifying areas that need to be worked on for running a business
- Identifying requirements for getting a business license and loan, and helping them understand the importance of paperwork
- Provide a working knowledge of leasing space
- Connecting entrepreneurs with contacts at Summit National Bank<sup>8</sup> and other banks

**Serving Chamblee's Neighborhoods.** Since 1994, the main priority of Chamblee has been to address basic neighborhood preservation issues such as zoning, housing conditions, crime prevention and police protection, and sanitation, to name a few. Every department is involved in a cohesive effort to serve all of Chamblee's residents within and outside of the International Village.

In a culturally diverse community such as Chamblee, serving the residents means more than providing basic public services. It also means helping them adjust to basic laws in an American society that typically differ from the laws in their home country. Perkins and other city staffers have helped residents learn the differences, such as understanding that five-year olds do not "work," or that school is not an option for children, or that government officials do not take bribes.

## **Outcomes**

While the master plan has not been fully implemented yet, Chamblee's International Village has already generated benefits for the whole community.

**New Face of Entrepreneurs.** While results from the 2000 Census are not reported yet, the International Village is estimated to be home to more than 5,000 foreign-born residents and over 700 businesses owned primarily by first-

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<sup>8</sup> Summit National Bank is considered by Perkins to be one of Chamblee's "community champions." Bank executives Pin Pin Chau and David Yu have actively worked with entrepreneurs of varied ethnicity.

generation immigrants.<sup>9</sup> It houses the largest concentration of ethnically oriented businesses in Georgia.

**No Poverty Housing Left.** One of the 'basic issues' prioritized by Chamblee was to improve the living conditions of its residents. Perkins reports that as of May 2000, there is no poverty housing left in the International Village area or the city, explaining that the majority of the housing has been rehabilitated.

**International Village Cultural and Community Center (IVCCC).** In 1999, Sheltering Arms opened its new 17,000-square foot childcare center in the International Village, completing phase I of the IVCCC. More than 130 children attend this center representing a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The success of Sheltering Arms helped attract another anchor tenant - the Boys and Girls Club of Metro Atlanta - for the multi-purpose center component or phase II of the IVCCC.

**Retention and Attraction of Business.** The biggest business retention challenge for a community of entrepreneurs such as Chamblee is business license renewal. Perkins reports that Chamblee's technical assistance within and around the International Village has had a positive impact on business retention. At the same time, Chamblee has helped new entrepreneurs start successful businesses such as Latin American Records, The Orient Center, and Don Taco.

**Attention from the Atlanta Regional Commission.** In March 2000, the Atlanta Regional Commission awarded Chamblee a "livable centers initiative" grant to study opportunities for linking the rapid transit rail station<sup>10</sup> in the city with both the Central Business District and International Village. Perkins views the city's efforts within and around the International Village and Central Business District as a contributing factor in receiving the grant award.

## **Conclusion**

Rather than manifesting an 'us versus them' mentality, Chamblee has welcomed its new residents by creating a special district - the International Village - to allow them to grow their own industries and raise their families. In developing the village, the city has not focused on seizing the big projects or creating an architecturally aesthetic community. Instead, it has focused on addressing and meeting the multicultural needs of new and existing residents and business owners.

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<sup>9</sup> Source: DeKalb Chamber of Commerce

<sup>10</sup> Operated by the Metro Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority.



## **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to thank and acknowledge two individuals for their assistance with this case study. In an interview on May 1, 2000, Paige Perkins, Community Development Director for the City of Chamblee, provided extensive information for this case study. Ms. Perkins can be reached at the City of Chamblee, 5468 Peachtree Road, Chamblee, GA 30341-2398, (voice) 770-986-5010, (fax) 770-986-5014. B. Keith Melton, Vice President of Development for the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce also provided information on "Orchestrating the Buyout" and the International Village Cultural and Community Center. Mr. Melton can be reached at the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce, 750 Commerce Drive, Suite 201, Decatur, Georgia 30030, (voice) 404-378-8000, (fax) 404-378-3397.

## **References**

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## Chronology

1980s	Chamblee's manufacturing base begins to decline rapidly
1992	DeKalb Chamber Vice President Ray Kemper studies the area now known as the International Village  1990 Census reveals large presence of foreign-born residents  Kemper creates International Village Task Force
1992-1994	Task force working groups and other organizations study International Village area
1993	Federal Aviation Administration creates a buyout program to finance the purchase of property in airport runway protection zones
1994	Chamblee's city administration undergoes major overhaul  Chamblee launches community wide planning process  Chamblee creates two special overlay districts - the Central Business District and the International Village and approves master plan
1995	Chamblee creates Community Development Director position and hires Paige Perkins to fill that role  New entrepreneurial businesses open in Chamblee, including Latin American Records.
1999	Phase I of International Village Cultural and Community Center is completed with the opening of Sheltering Arms child care center
2000	Chamblee is awarded the "livable cities initiative" grant from the Atlanta Regional Commission  More than 700 ethnically owned businesses are reported to in the International Village neighborhood.