

# MEAG POWER **current** COMMUNITIES

## COMMERCE, GEORGIA

J. Clark Hill III, M.D. – Mayor  
706-336-3288

Pete Pyrzewski – City Manager/  
Economic Development  
706-336-3292

[www.commercega.org](http://www.commercega.org)



# COMMERCE

## Renewed Economic Development

*Commerce  
Has Location.  
Location. Location.*

A key component of the economic development focus being renewed in Commerce is preparation for new business, and the city's leadership is leveraging all its assets. One important asset is the Commerce 85 Business Park, a prime industrial property directly on Interstate 85 and ready for build-to-suit tenants. In addition, the Park includes an immense, existing speculative building ideal for distribution and warehousing. Also, business prospects, for the first time, can find valuable tax credits in a state-designated opportunity zone in Commerce, a great incentive for encouraging new enterprise in the established commercial areas of the city. Commerce earned this designation in early 2013.

In the words of real estate gurus, Commerce definitely has location, location, location. Just ask the city's existing companies such as the Southeast Toyota Distributors, Baker & Taylor book distributor or Roper Pumps, who are already taking full advantage of Commerce assets to serve regional and national markets.





# FAST FACTS COMMERCE



**POPULATION:** 6,544

**COUNTY:** Jackson – Population 60,485

**UTILITIES:** Commerce is a full-service city, providing electricity, natural gas and water/sewer utilities at competitive rates. While the city footprint is 8.3 square miles, the city provides essential services to the surrounding community.

**TRANSPORTATION:** Commerce is centrally located on I-85 and is served by Highways 53, 129 and 441. Rail is provided by Norfolk Southern.

**NOTABLE EMPLOYERS:**

- Baker & Taylor – Book distributor
- Commerce City School System
- Huber Engineered Woods LLC – Hardwood, veneers and plywood products
- Northridge Medical Center – Hospital complex
- Roper Pumps – Manufacturer of industrial pumps
- Southeast Toyota Distributors – Inland processing for Toyota automotive

*“Commerce is an ideal small community. We have great schools, some of the lowest property taxes in Jackson County, and, with innovative new leadership, we are poised to be in the best financial position we have experienced in five years. We are already moving in that direction.”*

– Mayor Clark Hill

## Always Open for Business

The City of Commerce began its life as the community of Harmony Grove, incorporated in December of 1884. The city encompassed all areas in a one-mile radius of the railroad depot. With the proximity to rail and an eye for business, Griffin Hardman launched Harmony Grove Mills in 1893 for the purpose of processing and producing cotton textiles. The mill flourished, and the owners built homes for their employees. Indeed, these early entrepreneurs are credited for bringing electricity not only to their mill operations, but in 1906, to the city’s residents and streets as well. Just two years earlier in 1904, citizens choose to rename their community Commerce, for its dominance in North Georgia business.

Other textile businesses followed Hardman, and The Commerce Overall Company, from its beginnings in 1917, became famous across the South for its Gander Brand of denim overalls.

With the 21st century, the textile industry transitioned to competitive world markets, but Commerce has nurtured new prosperity. Today, the rail that so much defined the city in its infancy still serves commercial operations in the region, and Commerce, always open for business, remains a great location for getting goods to market.

# THE PAINT IS STILL WET **In Commerce**

**Works in progress have tremendous energy about them, and it doesn't take long to get caught up in the excitement of a transformation. Such is the case in Commerce, Georgia. The leadership, the citizenry and businesses all are wielding a collective paintbrush to their community.**

Consider downtown. The recent library grand opening showcased new space in the children's library, more study nooks, and new learning technology. This 5,000-square-foot renovation was not slated to happen for another couple of years, but with money in the bank through a volunteer-led capital campaign, the state leapfrogged the project past less prepared communities. Commerce raised \$583,000 to ensure the state's \$1.5 million.

Commerce Civic Center, the former Blue Bell overall factory and venue for the sell-out 2013 Folk to Fine Arts Festival, underwent a partial renovation that unveiled original hardwood floors and stairs in the exhibit space. City public works employees provided much of the sweat equity in the rehab of this important event venue for the city.

Longstanding merchant Don Shubert of Shubert and Company, P.C., CPAs, which has been a downtown storefront since 1978, invested in a total refurbish of his building's brick façade, mimicking the detail of the original turn-of-the-century brickwork. The newest downtown restaurant, El Parian Mexican Bar & Grill, offers lunch and dinner as well as catering. Spencer Park, a popular green space in the downtown district, is the heart of the city, and volunteers from local businesses annually plant and maintain the landscaping.

Other city initiatives and facilities also have a fresh face. The city recreation department has doubled its lineup of program offerings, including ballroom dancing and a running club, and its sports field dugouts and bathrooms literally have a new coat of paint, adopting the color scheme of the spirited Commerce High School Tigers.

The paint on Commerce's new 173,000-square-foot high school is barely dry itself. The school's grand opening in 2011 anticipated an expanding school-age demographic as population grows in this community in the foothills of the North Georgia Mountains. The 2010 U.S. Census shows a 20 percent population growth for Commerce since 2000.

Further enhancements in the city include upgrades in infrastructure. The city has finalized improved Internet and phone service within city government offices, launched a new user-friendly website and is running telecommunication fiber to support data needs for business and schools.

With broad, bold strokes as well as a fine attention to detail, Commerce is enhancing its livable, workable community. Wet paint – it really is everywhere.



*top: Shubert and Company, P.C.  
bottom: Commerce Senior High School  
right: Technology center in the Children's Library*





The Hardman Residence

# More About HOMETOWN COMMERCE

- State-of-the-art health care plays a part in Commerce's economic future. The local hospital, Northridge Medical Center, under new governance and with its new moniker, has introduced a broad range of specialties and technologies. Also, local entrepreneur and physician Jim Bouchard is in Phase 1 of an 80-acre development, a campus of health-related of services.
- Successful physician, textile tycoon, and Georgia Governor Griffin Hardman hails from Commerce. He was Governor from 1927-1931. The Hardmans' Commerce residence, now a special events venue, boasts hand-painted murals and 13-inch thick walls designed to assuage Mrs. Hardman's fears of violent storms.
- Commerce is known throughout the region for the nationally recognized Tanger Outlet factory stores on I-85. The outlet draws thousands of shoppers annually.
- Olive Ann Burns is the 1984 award-winning author of *Cold Sassy Tree*, a novel loosely based on her experiences of growing up in Commerce.
- The Harmony Grove Female Academy, the first all-female school chartered in the state of Georgia, was chartered by the state legislature on December 20, 1824.
- When the Presbyterian Church left their historic downtown building to build a new church, the city restored the structure for the Commerce Cultural Center.