

MEAG POWER **current** COMMUNITIES

SYLVESTER, GEORGIA

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Artist rendering of the Depot plaza

SYLVESTER

Public and Private Partnerships

Take a look around this small southwest Georgia community and you see the tangible results of a resourceful city administration. A Department of Transportation grant supported a 1.7-mile streetscape on historic Isabella Street, a thoroughfare that connects Sylvester's K-12 school campus with downtown. New lighting and sidewalks invite pedestrian traffic.

The plaza and shelter for a turn-of-the-century steam locomotive, a city icon, got a facelift with a \$10,000 tourism grant, a city match, and support from citizens and the local historical society. This renovation is part of the larger effort to encourage tourism, develop the business corridor and draw people downtown.

Other recent city initiatives that have earned grant approval include an airport runway extension and energy-efficient improvements in city-owned facilities that will reap citywide cost savings. A multi-year renovation of the historic city hall and the nearby Depot, already a central gathering place for entertainment and citywide events, is in its early phases. The Depot plaza will feature a small amphitheater for outdoor venues, additional green space and there are even whispers of a possible splash park for children. The vision for the Depot itself is to recapture the architectural details and beauty of its earlier heyday.

The city also furthers community development with its own downtown façade program that encourages entrepreneurs to revitalize their storefronts, and with eight new businesses settling into downtown in early 2013, there are fresh candidates for these incentives.

*Success
Through
Collaboration*





FAST FACTS SYLVESTER



POPULATION: 6,188

COUNTY: Worth – Population 21,679

UTILITIES: Sylvester is a full-service city, providing electricity, natural gas and water/sewer utilities at competitive rates.

TRANSPORTATION: Sylvester, Georgia, is located on U.S. Highway 82 and Georgia State Route 33.

NOTABLE EMPLOYERS:

- ConAgra Foods – food processing
- Worth County School System – education
- Olam Edibles – nuts and nut processing
- Coca-Cola Distributor – soft drinks
- Napa Distribution – automotive parts

“Our staff is the reason we have been successful in earning grant dollars to enhance our community. They do a good job managing such projects and jumping through the administrative hoops that you find with state and federal incentives.”

– Mayor Bill Yearata

- In 1894, the citizens voted to change the name from Isabella Station to Sylvester. A vintage locomotive from the era is on display at a local park.
- Sylvester and Worth County enjoy ready access to the popular Lake Blackshear Resort, 8,700 aquatic acres for boating and water recreation.
- 2013 is the 50th anniversary of the Georgia Peanut Festival in Sylvester. Sylvester’s 1987 Georgia Peanut Festival holds the record for making the world’s largest peanut butter sandwich, 12-feet wide by 12-feet long. The festival is each October in T.C. Jeffords Park.
- As is true for many small rural towns, the early railroad helped define the centers of economic growth in Worth County in the late 1800s. It was the Brunswick and Albany Railroad’s 171-mile route going through Isabella Station that shifted the center of gravity for trade and commerce to Sylvester.
- The Peter Pan® Peanut Butter facility in Sylvester has an eye for green. The manufacturer reduced its carbon footprint with a reduction in the amount of plastic in each container. Reducing the amount of plastic means less packaging waste in landfills and less greenhouse gases in the environment.

AGRIBUSINESS: FRONT AND CENTER

Agriculture, particularly peanut and pecan production, as well as their processing, is big business in Sylvester and Worth County. Peanuts alone are a \$2 billion Georgia industry, and Worth County is in the top-five producing counties with over 20,000 acres in peanuts.

Peanut butter, the everyman sandwich staple, is also central to the Sylvester economy. Peter Pan® Peanut Butter, a flagship product for the FORTUNE 500 Company ConAgra, is produced here. Today, every jar of Peter Pan® Peanut Butter sold worldwide is produced in the Sylvester facility.

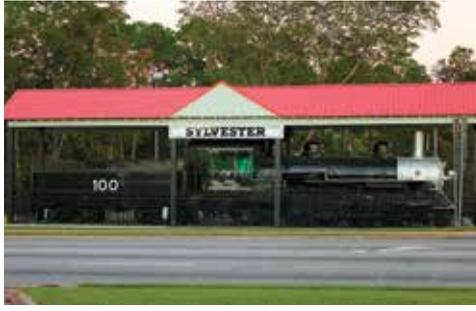
This ConAgra product, one of America's top-three peanut butter brands, is a point of pride for this community and a major local employer. The ConAgra facility was insulated from the huge job losses while the nationwide recession hit many industries. In fact, ConAgra has maintained steady employment levels.

"We didn't suffer the way some places did because of our farming and agriculture," says Karen Rackley, President/Executive Director of the Sylvester-Worth County Chamber of Commerce. "With farming comes irrigation systems, crops, chemicals, trucking—we have a lot of industry that caters to our farmers."

Sylvester is also in the midst of Georgia's pecan-producing region and in 2012 the state led the nation in pecan production. Sylvester companies such as Georgia Pecan Company grow and bag their pecans for local retail as well as distant markets. China has become a primary export destination for Georgia pecans.

From peanuts and pecans to vegetables and livestock, the communities of Sylvester and Worth County are front and center in Georgia's agribusiness.





More About HOMETOWN SYLVESTER

- Sylvester has a 200-acre industrial park with frontage on Highway 82 ideal for reaching the I-75 interchange in Tifton.
- The community newspaper, *Sylvester Local News*, is the oldest continuous business in Worth County with its beginnings in 1884 as the *Sumner Free Trader*. The paper's current home in downtown Sylvester was built in the late 1920s and still houses an original, fully functional linotype machine invented in the late 19th century.
- Camp Sylvester, a summer outreach program for kids from kindergarten through 13 years of age, is a collaboration of the city, Worth County Family Connection and community volunteers. The camp is in its second year and has record enrollment.
- The 10th annual spring "Great Clean Up!" attracted 220 citizen volunteers who collected 12 tons of trash throughout the city. "We accomplish projects through a collaboration of all our resources; it really is a matter of nurturing public and private partnerships along with a citizenry that has a will for building our community," concludes Deborah Bridges, Sylvester City Manager.
- The May to November Farmer's Market held each Saturday at the Depot is hugely popular with the locals. John Green, organic farmer and president of the Farmer's Market, garners local corporate sponsors with assistance by the city to create this venue.
- Sue Monk Kidd, author of *The New York Times*' bestsellers, *The Secret Life of Bees* and *The Mermaid Chair*, was born in Sylvester.

