

From the Desk of Commissioner Bill Kendall
MOHAWK PLANT CLOSING AND HOUSING MARKET CAUSING PAIN
LONG TERM ECONOMIC STATE OF COUNTY BRIGHT

The recent closing of the Mohawk Plant in Hiawassee and the poor housing & real estate market have left many citizens unemployed and hurting. The sharp increase in gasoline and food prices is devastating. It is imperative that we make a concentrated effort to replace these jobs with another plant at this location. Therefore, I have asked State Labor Commissioner Michael Thrumon's office for assistance by meeting on Tuesday April 15 at 2 P.M. in the Courthouse with the Industrial Authority, Towns County's financial institutes and the Chamber of Commerce to aid Towns County in developing a plan and to create a search committee to find an industry to fill the jobs vacated by Mohawk. Other counties and States are also hurting. Mohawk closed a plant in Lumpkin County and carpet companies in West Georgia counties are also moving overseas.

THE ECONOMIC INDICATORS FOR TOWNS COUNTY ARE VERY GOOD for the next five years, through 2012. However, it is absolutely imperative that we continue to develop and enforce policies to protect our natural resources, particularly our mountains and lake which is the economic engine driving our economy.

Employment economic indicators published in Georgia Trend Magazine, by the University of Georgia, Selig Center for Economic Growth, Terry College for Business show that Towns County's employment from 2008 through 2012 will grow at a 6.0% growth rate with only five of the states 159 counties showing a larger percentage of employment growth rate. Towns County's 6.0% substantially outpaces its neighboring counties as follows: White 1.4%, Rabun -0.1%, Lumpkin 3.6%, Union 4.7% Fannin 2.7%, Habersham 0.7% Hall 2.6%. The State average is 1.7%.

Per Capita Personal Income indicators through 2012 show Towns County at 3.4% with only Greene County at 3.7% of the twenty (20) northeast counties outpacing Towns, and only seven of the 159 counties in the State having income percentage increases higher than Towns County. The State average is 2.4%. It is significant that Greene County also has a lake, is developing resorts and that tourism is boosting employment and income. This re-enforces the importance of Towns County protecting the ecological health of Lake Chatuge, which truly is the lifeblood of our economy.

Tourism, retirement facilities and the transition of Young Harris College from a two-year to a four-year college are the primary factors that put Towns County at the very top tier of the states 159 counties in percentage of employment and per capita personal income growth over the next five years.

However, for the short term, until the housing market and recession pass, we must pursue an industry to fill the jobs lost by Mohawk closing. It will not be easy with companies sending all these jobs overseas and a recession upon us, and I firmly believe we are in a recession. During the month of March 2007, Towns County Government received \$138,326 in sales tax, March 2008 was down 29% to \$98,787.

If we stay the course we have set, of controlled quality growth to protect our natural resources and quality of life of our citizens, these economic indicators, which have a history of being amazingly accurate, show employment and income will come. See charts below: