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## Synovus Financial Corp.

**About:** Synovus provides commercial and retail banking, investment and mortgage services in five southern states through more than 250 branches and 28 locally branded divisions.

**Family Focus:** The Family Education Leave allows employees to participate in

### UGA Small Business Development Center 2016 Best Place to Work

The University of Georgia's (UGA) Small Business Development Center (SBDC) program, part of the university's Public Service and Outreach arm, provides business training and consulting to small business owners and prospective entrepreneurs. Small business is an important part of Georgia's economy and the SBDC is one of UGA's most significant resources for helping entrepreneurs acquire the knowledge and skills they need to help maximize their chances for success.

SBDC State Director Allan Adams commented on the SBDC's "Best Places to Work" designation: "We are very fortunate to have an amazing statewide team. All of our staff are hired from the private sector and we help them become business educators. Our employees derive satisfaction from helping others learn and seeing business owners' succeed."

SBDC employee comments on the Best Places to Work survey give an indication of what makes the SBDC a satisfying work environment:

*"Colleagues are highly educated and professional. The organization's mission appeals to a person's higher-purpose awareness."*

*"The organization is open and honest, but does hold people accountable."*

*"The work is very satisfying...you help people and see immediate results."*

*"It is wonderful to work for a place that treats you as a competent individual instead of just a number."*

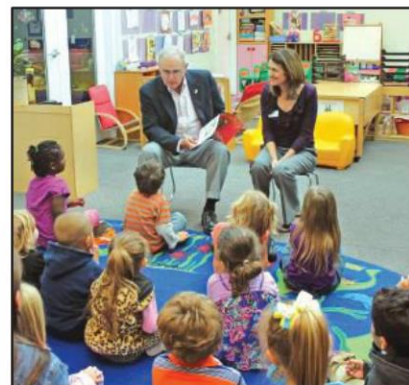
*"Our organization values creativity, ingenuity and the desire to make an impact on our community."*

*"This organization provides me an environment to grow, to learn new skills and knowledge that can be used to share with others, and challenges me to become the very best that I can become."*

The SBDC program is hosted statewide by the University of Georgia and six of its 17 offices are hosted by other units of the University System of Georgia – Georgia State, Kennesaw State, Georgia Southern, Valdosta State, and Clayton State Universities and the University of West Georgia. Adams noted, "We work as one team, regardless of whose payroll we are on."



Sponsored



**Once Upon a Time:** Legislators and Synovus employees reading to kids during Georgia Pre-K Week

school or education activities for children, grandchildren or other family members during work hours.

**Giving Back:** Contributed \$700,000 to United Way through employee pledges and corporate gifts. Its Jack Parker Scholarship Fund has awarded more than \$2 million to students since it was established in 1988.

**Keeping It Green:** Reduced paper waste by 30 percent over the last four years and invested in high-efficiency HVAC units, Energy Star appliances, low-watt LED lights and motion sensor lighting systems at its facilities.

**Healthy Lives:** Free annual health assessments. Offers wellness programs with access to coaching for weight, sleep deprivation, smoking cessation and stress management along with programs for fitness, nutrition and special health needs like diabetes.

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synovus.com

Columbus

Banking

4,452 employees

### 17 Atlantic Foot and Ankle Specialists

atlanticfeet.com

Savannah

Healthcare provider

55 employees





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**Big Positives:** From left, David Seem, chief financial officer at Miller Zell, and Boulevard CID Executive Director Gil Prado

CIDs consist of business property owners in a particular geographic area who band together to pay extra taxes – yes, you read that correctly – up to five mills, to help pay for local projects. They must have the okay of local governments and the General Assembly, and once formed expect to have a strong voice in conversations about traffic planning, infrastructure improvements, public safety and beautification efforts.

These entities that bridge the gap between the public and private sectors play a huge role in the economic development of their districts. As the airport grows, traffic increases and new businesses see the area’s potential, the CIDs are ramping up and tackling issues including crime and transportation.

### Boulevard CID

It was 2007, and officials at Miller Zell had seen enough.

For 40 years, the retail store design company had been a major player in the Fulton Industrial Boulevard area, overseeing 800,000 square feet of real estate and employing more than 400 people. But management had become increasingly alarmed as conditions in the area grew worse each year.

Vagrancy and crime were increasing. The area was taking on a seedy appearance. Prospective business clients began to cancel meetings once they had a chance to survey the neighborhood. Prospective hires would sometimes accept a job offer, but renege once their spouses looked the area over and expressed doubts about their safety.

“We were ready to step across the river into Douglas County,” says David Seem, Miller Zell’s chief financial officer. “We were contemplating the move because we weren’t getting cooperation from county officials and law enforcement. But we had some Fulton County officials who convinced us to stay and convinced us that formation of a community improvement district might help solve some of the problems.”

# Southern Investments

## Four CIDs in South Metro Atlanta are working to increase prosperity and beautify their districts

BY STAN AWTREY

**S**outh Metro Atlanta is booming these days. For years it’s been home to Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport – the world’s busiest airport – along with warehousing, distribution centers and logistics operations. Now it’s branching out. Porsche’s new headquarters has raised the profile of the entire area, giving leaders the confidence to go after a broad array of businesses and showing businesses that it’s time to invest in the area to make it more attractive, safer and business friendly. Four community improvement districts (CID) – Boulevard, South Fulton, Atlanta Aeropolis and East Metro DeKalb – are leading the charge.



“We’re seeing investment and feel the district is on the cusp of revitalization and redevelopment. We believe 2016 is going to be a big year.” – **Gil Prado**, executive director of the Boulevard CID

The creation of the Boulevard CID in 2010 has helped revitalize the area. The CID sits west of I-285 and stretches for about eight miles from Charlie Brown Airport to Campbellton Road, with I-20 bisecting it. Fulton Industrial Boulevard is the spine that runs the CID’s length. Within its borders is one of the largest industrial corridors in the Eastern United States, with 550 warehouses, 46 million square feet of industrial space and 20,000 workers.

The CID hired a public safety manager, funded additional police officers and started a no trespassing program that empowered police to arrest people who were lurking in the area, all of which helped solve many of the area’s crime-related problems – centered around the I-20 exits, according to CID executive director Gil Prado – that were driving business away.

“You go farther than half a mile south of I-20 and it’s really a thriving industrial area,” Prado says, citing the presence of Coca-Cola, UPS, Frito-Lay and Quaker Oats. “We have some amazing companies.”

Prado says the CID has identified some problem areas, specifically those adjacent to the I-20 interchanges. Of 56 parcels, 25 have been targeted as problems – vacant land, blighted buildings, crime-riddled hotels.

One of the first steps in the improvement is aesthetics. Plans are in the works for more streetscape improvements, from sidewalks and crosswalks to signage. A recent project saw the addition of ADA ramps and sidewalks on a stretch of Fulton Industrial Boulevard.

Another step in 2015 was restoration of the Gateway Sculpture, the only remaining piece of a collection of 30 that was installed in the 1960s. The sculpture measures 180 feet by 90 feet by 90 feet and was part of the master plan when the Fulton Industrial Boulevard area was established. The CID funded the refurbishment of the work and the restoration of its original red color.

Prado says the changes are already starting to pay off. Atlanta Beverage has proposed a \$25-million expansion of its plant. Studios have purchased lots for movie production. Real estate is changing hands, an indication of new blood, he says.

“We’re seeing investment and feel the district is on the cusp of revitalization and redevelopment,” he says. “We believe 2016 is going to be a big year.”

Meanwhile, Miller Zell is no longer looking for greener pastures. The company is in the process of acquiring a 325,000-square-foot building within the CID to serve as its new headquarters.

“We’re laying the groundwork for another 20 years on the Boulevard, because we’ve seen significant improvement,” Seem says. “In six years we’ve gone from a deteriorating social and economic environment to one that’s been a big positive. We believe in the CID, what it’s done, and we believe it’s going to do more good things in the future.”

## South Fulton CID

Traffic is the most daunting issue faced by the South Fulton CID, which covers 6,446 acres of commercial and industrial property in Fairburn, Union City and unincorporated Fulton County.

The importance of the issue is evident in two of its current projects: the reconstruction of the intersection at I-85 and Ga. Hwy. 74 and the development of a park-and-ride lot in Fairburn.



SOUTH FULTON CID

“With the CSX intermodal line and the growing warehouse space, we have a lot of trucks trying to get access to the interstate,” says Joddie Gray, administrator for the South Fulton CID. “Reconstruction of that interchange is a big deal for us. There are more trucks on the road every day. For us that means our area is successful. But it also means more traffic and congestion. Economic development means keeping the traffic flowing and giving them good access.”

The interchange is one of the most congested on I-85 south of Atlanta, and volume is expected to increase by 50 percent by 2040, according to one report. A design for the interchange, which will include a partial cloverleaf, is underway, and construction is expected to begin by the end of 2018.

The new park-and-ride is being built on land donated by the city of Fairburn. The project is being funded entirely by the South Fulton CID in an effort to promote carpooling by residents who work at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. The project is currently under design.

The South Fulton CID’s big success last year was completion of an expansion of a 1.69-mile stretch of Oakley Industrial Boulevard. The project was a boost in terms of increasing safety and improving the traffic flow.

“There was a school bus stop there, and the kids were waiting with no sidewalks and trucks were blowing by,” Gray says. “It was horrible.”

The project expanded the busy road from two to three lanes and added turn lanes and shoulders. New sidewalks help protect children while waiting for the bus, as well as give pedestrians access to local businesses.

Traffic “flows a lot better there,” says

**Road Safety:** South Fulton CID Administrator  
Joddie Gray