



Chattooga and Douglas Counties 2008 Report

Georgia 4-H, based on a suggestion from Governor Sonny Perdue and the Governor's Agriculture Advisory Committee, launched a rural and urban youth exchange program. The Governor's Urban/Rural Exchange Program (GUREP) was established in 2006 as a way for students from both urban and rural areas in Georgia to experience life outside of the communities that they live in. Georgia 4-H led the experience because its large student enrollment is almost equally divided between rural and urban Georgia, balanced in gender and diverse in ethnicity.

The project was designed to enhance the understanding of both groups relative to agriculture, economic opportunities and culture found in their counter parts' communities. With the endorsement of our Governor and the Agriculture advisory committee, 4-H involved families in an exchange experience that increased the cooperation and networking between Georgia's urban and rural population. The exchange program also provided an opportunity for rural and urban leaders to showcase their communities to the young people of this state.

Chattooga and Douglass Counties

Chattooga and Douglas Counties differ in several ways regarding size, population, tourism, economics, location and lifestyles:

Located 90 miles Northwest of Atlanta and bounded by historic Lookout Mountain to the west and Taylor's Ridge to the south, rural Chattooga County boasts of farmlands, national forests, nature trails, and mountain vistas. With a county population density of 85 per square mile and a population of 26,797, the median household income is \$33,065 with 18.5% of the population living below poverty level.

Douglas County is located only 20 miles from Atlanta, and is referred to as the "Western Gateway to Atlanta." Eight major highways or interstates run through Douglas County and the county has a population density of 492 per square mile and a population of about 124,495. The median household income is reported as \$53,834 with 9.7% of the population living below poverty level.

Visiting Chattooga County

The exchange began Oct. 17, when 6 students from Douglas County made their way to Chattooga County for a weekend of rural life.

The Douglas and Chattooga County students all met at the Thomas farm where they participated in several activities commonly done on a farm. The activities began with a Low Country Boil, allowing the students to experience a taste of rural living, followed by a covered wagon ride and tour of the working farm. The students had the opportunity to grind corn meal, using a grist mill and then went “snipe hunting.” At the end of the first day, before heading home with their designated host or guest, the students, who were already beginning to form friendships, gathered around a campfire and toasted marshmallows to make “s’mores.”

The next morning the students met at the Chattooga County Extension Office for breakfast and then attended the Sequoyah Arts and Crafts Festival being held that weekend. Most of the Douglas County students were shocked to see that Dowdy Park was so small, because they were used to attending events at large state parks like Stone Mountain. After attending the festival, the students were taken to Paradise Gardens to explore the artwork garden and learn about the life of renowned folk artist, Howard Finster. After the students ate lunch, they were taken on a surprise trip to Rock City, where the students were able to experience the beautiful views and rock formations. After eating dinner the students were taken to a haunted corn maze, where they laughed and bonded while experiencing a typical Northwest Georgia fall tradition.

Visiting Douglas County

On Jan. 2, six Chattooga County students had the chance to experience urban life when they visited their new friends in Douglas County. The adventure began when the groups met at an Arby’s Test Kitchen, where new menu items are created and sampled. After learning what a chef does, the students had the opportunity to create their own menu items and attend a marketing meeting to try to pitch their creations to the marketing team. This was a great way for the Chattooga County students to see the difference between rural and urban job opportunities.

After leaving the Test Kitchen, the students visited the Georgia Tech Aquatic Center, where all swimming, diving, and synchronized swimming events were held during the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games in Atlanta. After dinner, the students had the opportunity to explore one of Atlanta’s large malls before heading back to their hosts’ homes.

The next morning the group met at the Douglas County Courthouse and then volunteered at the Samaritan House, a homeless shelter for men, where they prepared meals for those in need. After volunteering at the shelter, the group ate lunch at one of Atlanta’s most well-known landmarks, The Varsity, and then headed to Stone Mountain to play in the manmade snow.

Broadening Horizons

The GUREP is a great way for students in both rural and urban areas to experience life in a county opposite from what they are used to. The Urban/Rural Exchange helps to broaden the horizons of each student participating and allows students to see life through a different perspective while along the way building character, and making memories and friendships to last a lifetime.

Through the experience, youth from both counties had the opportunity to discuss major challenges faced, agricultural industry and the opportunities for youth in their respective counties. Following are some the observations made by the students:

- Although population and county industry is vastly different, the students noted that water quality and pollution were common issues faced in both communities.
- The agricultural industry in urban and rural counties is quite different. Chattooga County has a rich traditional heritage and crops such as cotton, soybeans, forage, fruits, vegetables and dairy are important parts of the local economy. In urban Douglas County, traditional agriculture is almost no existence but the horticultural industry is a vital part of the local economy. Although different, agriculture does provide economic impact on both counties.
- Career and economic opportunities are more prevalent in urban counties when most residences work in close relationship to their homes. In rural counties, many residents seek employment outside of the county so they can enjoy the benefits of living in a smaller, quieter community.
- Outside of 4-H, church and other school activities, there are few entertainment options for youth in rural counties while a host of opportunities in urban counties. Urban counties also offer more opportunities for youth to volunteers and be of service to their communities. With these increased options, there is also an increased exposure of “Risky Behaviors” for urban youth.
- Transportation and the ability to drive for teens carry vast degrees of importance between rural and urban youth. Urban youth seem to have less desire to obtain drivers license than rural youth. Participants cited that this may be do the greater amount of opportunities closer to home and public transportation systems found in urban communities. Rural youth seem to value the ability to obtain a drivers license more since having their own transportation is often necessary for them to participate in other activities.