For McClarty, DeKalb traffic issues drive development

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One of McClarty’s jobs has been to encourage the chamber’s smaller members to become environmentally sensitive in their business practices. He’s made his point by organizing seminars and lunch talks about what small companies in other metropolitan areas are doing.

“It’s one thing to be a Volvo or a Home Depot and to be green and have sustainable practices. They’ve got money for research and development, and they’ve got people who work in process improvement and supply chain and all of these specialties,” McClarty says. “To companies that have five or six employees, it’s different. We’re just trying to help them understand what’s out there.”

Environmental concerns are also critical in the economic development component of McClarty’s job, particularly in terms of Atlanta’s traffic and air quality. Because of issues like traffic congestion, and because of the constant rivalry with its much larger neighbor in Atlanta, the DeKalb County chamber director’s most difficult challenge will remain economic development, Crowell says.

“It’s a tough battle because we’re so close to the city of Atlanta,” she says. “We compete for the same customers as Atlanta. DeKalb County is so dense, there’s not a lot of room to bring in new industry.”

As Georgia’s leaders have haggled for years—to date, without a solution—for how to pay for improvements to the region’s roads and mass transit, McClarty and other business proponents have tried to persuade elected officials that without a firm plan, Atlanta could soon fall behind its Southeastern competitors, namely Charlotte, Nashville and Birmingham, in economic development.

“That’s gotten to the point where it dictates everything that you do,” says McClarty, who lives in Tucker with his wife, Sherlena, and 2-year-old daughter. “It dictates when you take your kids to ballet or to baseball. It dictates when and where you schedule your meetings.”

So while land use and zoning decisions are often topics of discussion with companies looking to move to or expand in DeKalb County, McClarty says traffic is on everyone’s mind.

“One of our strengths for the Atlanta area is our roads. We’ve got the major interstates in I-85, I-285 and I-20,” he says. “But the same thing that one of the biggest congestion, and because of the constant rivalry with its much larger neighbor in Atlanta, the DeKalb County chamber director’s most difficult challenge will remain economic development, Crowell says.

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