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## Ease of access keys Georgia Highlands' success

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by Bill Baldowski

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From left, Georgia Highlands College Sophomore Qwaunzee Jones of Acworth studies with fellow student Roy Rios and student tutor Amanda Niemann of Powder Springs.

Georgia Highlands College has made accessibility part of its equation for students successfully gaining associate or baccalaureate degrees.

Ease of access has been the driving force behind the college expanding from its original location in Rome to campuses in Bartow, Cobb, Douglas and Paulding counties, said interim president Renva Watterson.

The average age of its student body is over 25 and the majority of its students work, she said.

"Due to employers' ever-increasing need for more highly-educated employees, we have found that our students are returning to college to gain an associate or baccalaureate degree," Watterson said.

"We have so many students living and working throughout the northwest Georgia corridor."

"With most of them being the non-traditional college students with regard to age and employment, we wanted to make their efforts to gain an associate degree as easy as possible."

The state-funded college was founded in 1971 as Floyd County Junior College and now enrolls more than 5,700 students.

Its Cartersville campus opened in 2005, while its downtown Dallas campus opened in 2009 and its Douglasville campus opened in 2010.

The college now offers more than 20 associate degrees and, most recently, the college's first bachelor of science degree in nursing.

The college has partnered with some Georgia four-year institutions to streamline the process of transferring graduate credits toward full four-year degrees, Watterson said.

She said a recent economic study revealed that by the year 2020, more than 60 percent of Georgians will need some level of post-secondary education to obtain the educational credentials for a successful career.

"That being the case, those seeking a career will need higher educational credentials to not only secure a job, but keep it," she said.

The expansion of campus sites also helps increase the graduation rate and helps local businesses.

"Our job is to help develop a workforce capable of meeting the increased educational demand of employers," Watterson said.

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