



ART AND CREATIVITY CONTINUE TO DRIVE COLQUITT'S TOURISM-BASED STRATEGY AS VISITORS RETURN POST-PANDEMIC TO VISIT MURALS, THE MAYHAW FESTIVAL, AND THE SWAMP GRAVY PRODUCTION.

Visitors to Colquitt will encounter colorful murals painted against town buildings and peanut silos. They can also attend theatrical productions of Swamp Gravy, which bring local stories and folk tales to life. Since 2006, the small town of Colquitt has continued its focus on art and creativity as the primary root of the town's economy. Although only covering an area of approximately 8.3 square miles, Colquitt is a vibrant town in Georgia with a strong commitment to its creative economy.

Tourism

The Colquitt-Miller Arts council continues to offer a variety of activities for tourists and locals alike. Swamp Gravy celebrates over 25 years of bringing the community closer

together through storytelling. New stories are added to the play each year, but the basic structure remains the same. Performed in October and March in Cotton Hall Theater, Swamp Gravy attracts audiences from far and wide—greatly contributing to the tourism rates in Colquitt. In fact, an average of 40,000 people visit the town each year to watch the local production.¹ And if the audience can't travel? No problem! Swamp Gravy will tour anywhere. They have a special production just for touring, which keeps the flavor of Swamp Gravy and uses about 15-20 performers. Anyone wishing to bring Swamp Gravy to their town can contact the organization for more information such as pricing.² They have toured many locations in the United States, as well as South America.³ As described in the original case study, the play continues to address difficult themes such

¹ "The Small But Mighty City of Colquitt Doesn't Quit." ICMA website. July 6, 2017

² Frequently Asked Questions. (2021, February 10). Cotton Hall. Retrieved March 2, 2022, from <https://swampgravy.com/about-us/frequently-asked-questions/>

³ Frequently Asked Questions." Swamp Gravy website. N.d

as racism, breaking through traditional barriers and building community.⁴ In addition to Swamp Gravy, the Cotton Hall hosts a different musical each spring. Recent shows on the schedule include “Nuthin’ But a Will,” “A Merry May-Haw Christmas,” and “Mama Mia!” They also switch into Youth Theatre mode each June to produce one show a year geared toward children and young adults (in June 2019, the show was Shrek the Musical Jr).



Tourism revenue from Swamp Gravy goes toward downtown revitalization efforts. In 2019, the town reconstituted the Downtown Development Authority and hired an executive director. Since then, the Town of Colquitt has been designated as a rural zone as part of a collaborative program between the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and the Georgia Department of Economic Development. This program offers tax incentive credits for businesses to invest

in the downtown area.⁵ The town is also using revenue to repurpose dilapidated areas downtown and have received grant funding for a master plan.⁶



According to the town’s website, residents often think of Colquitt as the “Mayhaw Capital of the World.” What better way to showcase this reputation than an annual event named after the small red berry used in jams and jellies? Every year, Colquitt hosts the National Mayhaw Festival, a one-day event run by the town’s chamber of commerce. The festival includes a golf tournament as well as a 5k run and parade. The town recently celebrated its 36th annual National Mayhaw Festival which draws 5,000-10,000 people each year and includes nearly 100 local vendors.⁷

Apart from festivals and folk life plays, the town’s Strategic Growth Plan also prioritizes Colquitt’s beautiful murals. In 1998, the Colquitt/Miller County Arts Council received a

4 Entertainment.” Colquitt-Miller County Chamber of Commerce website. N.d.

5 Ten New Communities Designated as Rural Zones | Georgia Department of Community Affairs. (n.d.). Georgia Department of Community Affairs. Retrieved March 2, 2022, from <https://www.dca.ga.gov/newsroom/blog/ten-new-communities-designated-rural-zones>

6 Interview with Cory Thomas. January 19, 2022.

7 “The Small But Mighty City of Colquitt Doesn’t Quit.” ICMA website. July 6, 2017

grant to begin the Millennium Mural Project which included painting 10 murals in and around Colquitt. By 2007, the project completed 12 murals. Four more were created between 2008-2011. No new murals have been created since 2011, and Hurricane Michael destroyed one in 2018.⁸ As of today, the Arts Council offers guided mural tours which visit 14 murals; these tours regularly occur on show days, and at other times by appointment. Given Colquitt’s status as a tourist location for murals, the town hosted the Global Mural, Arts and Cultural Tourism Association Conference in October 2010.⁹

Local Business Retention



Colquitt houses Market on the Square, a retail store where local businesses bring their products to be sold. Market on the Square is run by the Colquitt/Miller County Arts Council and has been open for 20 years. The store welcomes visitors and makes a variety of locally-made goods available in one

place. Vendors can have long-term partnerships with Market on The Square or use it as a stepping stone to open their own store. This has created a sense of camaraderie among local business owners who often refer customers to other stores to help them find what they are looking for.¹⁰

Setbacks and COVID-19

COVID-19 has prevented Swamp Gravy from touring and holding regular productions. As a result, tourism revenues from the play have decreased. However, the town is still experiencing growth, and the theater is set to open back up in March of 2022.¹¹

In October 2018, Hurricane Michael hit many small Georgia towns hard, including Colquitt. Sources say the area was almost “unrecognizable.” Given the damage sustained from the hurricane, the town put out a request for proposals to provide consulting services for both disaster recovery and FEMA public assistance.¹² Despite unexpected events like natural disasters and the pandemic, the town continues to improve downtown business, connect with its local community and visitors, and promote a culture of art and festivals.

⁸ Interview with Cory Thomas. January 19, 2022.

⁹ <https://icma.org/blog-posts/small-mighty-city-colquitt-doesnt-quit>

¹⁰ Market on the Square helps small business owners succeed. (2018, August 16). WTXL. Retrieved February 15, 2022, from https://www.wtxl.com/news/market-on-the-square-helps-small-business-owners-succeed/article_eb35e150-a194-11e8-9961-6f212ca913b7.html

¹¹ Interview with Cory Thomas. January 19, 2022.

¹² 2018, Request for Proposals. Retrieved March 3, 2022 from: <https://zdoc.pub/request-for-proposals-city-of-colquitt-ga-amp-miller-county6484305c9c4defbc368e01b0996dea2a25749.html>

Outcomes:

- Partnership with the Colquitt/Miller Arts Council which has reinvested over \$1 million in downtown Colquitt
- The town has maintained its reputation as a thriving arts community and tourist destination through such projects as Swamp Gravy, the National Mayhaw Festival, and colorful murals added across town.



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