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## Booming business revamps county

### Success of previous projects, population rise lure new retailers, jobs

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Rankin County's evolution from rural area into commercial powerhouse continues with several multimillion-dollar projects that will lure new residents and businesses ready to cater to their needs.

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Lakeland Drive has transformed from a country road to Starkville to one of the busiest in the metro area, showcasing big box retailers and specialty shops along large stretches.

"The retail is all driven by the number of jobs here, a product of the jobs that have been created (already)," said Larry Mobley, assistant director of Rankin First, the county's economic development group.

Developers are encouraged by the success of projects such as Flowood's Dogwood shopping centers and want to tap into Rankin's growing population, Mobley said.

The county's population has grown 59 percent since 1990. Rankin has about 138,000 residents today, up from about 87,000 in 1990.

Part of that population growth is happening because more people are staying in Rankin



File photo/The Clarion-Ledger

Construction continues on the outlet mall planned in Pearl. The stores are part of the \$175 million development that includes the mall, a baseball stadium, a hotel and a future Sam's Club. New stores, residents and multimillion-dollar projects are reshaping the mostly rural county

#### Municipalities Brandon

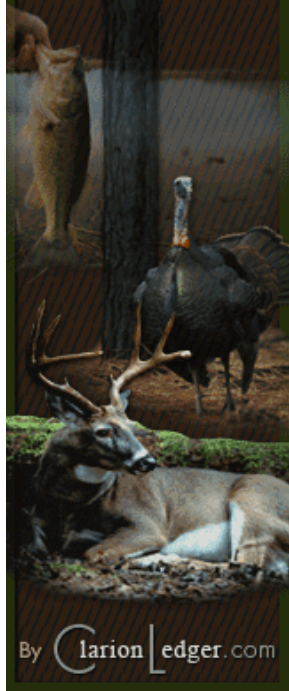
- Mayor Carlo Martella
- Sales tax revenue (FY07): \$4.66 million

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## OUTDOORS



County or returning there after finishing college to start their careers, said Tom Troxler, executive director of Rankin First, the county's economic development arm.

But with all the new residents, Rankin County continues to keep one of the lowest unemployment rates in the state. Rankin had the lowest unemployment rate in the state in November at 3.7 percent, the latest figures available, state records show.

"There are a lot more jobs available" for residents, Troxler said.

County officials say the area is a natural retail and residential hub because of its proximity to two interstates and the presence of Jackson-Evers International Airport.

Several of the county's largest projects under construction aim to create communities within larger areas.

Projects such as Town Center in Flowood, Stonebridge in Brandon and Arbor Landing will have hundreds of homes with parks, lakes and retail outlets.

Stonebridge developers have donated land for the school district to build a school inside the development.

Gale Martin, executive director of the Rankin County Chamber of Commerce, said the county is about 60 percent rural but sees more residential growth coming, noting Pelahatchie is building its first two major subdivisions.

Developers also recently announced plans to build Legacy Connection, an open-air mall in Florence that will be similar to Dogwood's shops.

Buster Bailey, the man behind Highland Colony Parkway in Madison County, envisions his \$35 million Grants Ferry Parkway project as the next major economic corridor in the metro area.

The roadway will connect I-20 and Mississippi 471 and open up 800 acres for development, he said.

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### In your voice

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#### Flowood

- Mayor Gary Rhoads
- Sales tax revenue (FY07): \$8.99 million

#### Florence

- Mayor Wendall Godfrey
- Sales tax revenue (FY07): \$627,735

#### Pearl

- Mayor Jimmy Foster
- Sales tax revenue (FY07): \$7.76 million

#### Pelahatchie

- Mayor Knox Ross
- Sales tax revenue (FY07): \$300,659

#### Puckett

- Mayor Ross Espiritu
- Sales tax revenue (FY07): \$100,218

#### Richland

- Mayor Mark Scarborough
- Sales tax revenue (FY07): \$4.43 million

#### Demographics

- Population: 138,284
- Businesses: 4,657
- Households: 47,915
- Median age: 36
- Average household income: \$57,717
- Per capita income: \$20,613
- Jobless rate: 3.7 percent

#### 10 largest employers

- Rankin County School District: 2,726
- Mississippi State Hospital: 2,409
- River Oaks Health System: 1,200
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Mississippi: 1,100
- Hudspeth Regional Center: 860
- Central Mississippi Correctional Facility: 640
- Wal-Mart (Pearl): 500
- Pearl Public School District: 470
- Rankin Medical Center: 465

- Wal-Mart (Flowood): 448

Sources: Mississippi Development Authority, Greater Jackson Alliance, Rankin First, Rankin Chamber of Commerce, Secretary of State, staff

#### Key facts

##### Key Facts


- County seat: Brandon
- Formed: 1829
- Area: 805.9 square miles
- Budget: \$100 million
- New and expanded businesses in last two years: 462
- Investment of new and expanded businesses in last two years: \$359.9 million

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