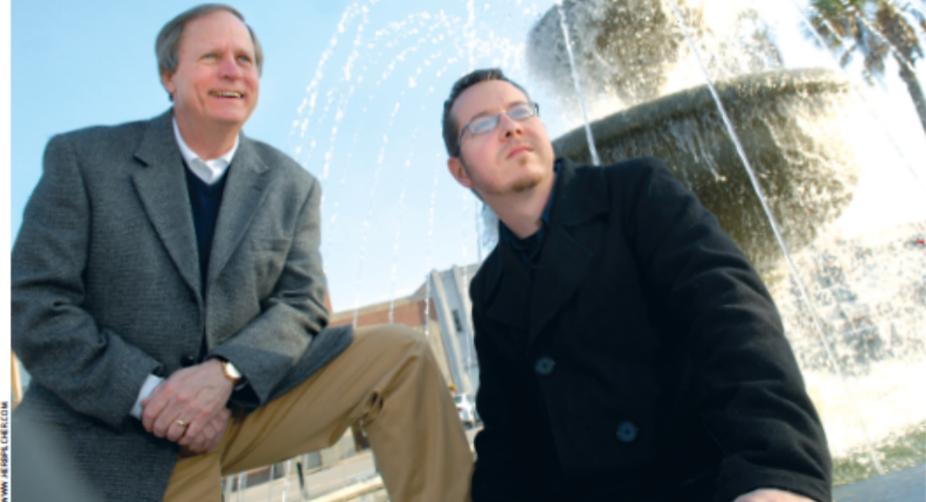


Downtown Boosters: Bill Rogers, left, executive director of the Swainsboro-Emanuel County Chamber, and Anthony Faris, director of the Swainsboro Downtown Development Authority



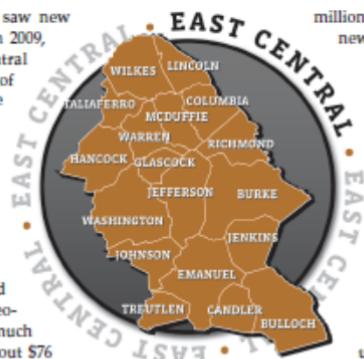
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Working Harder

By Linda M. Erbele

AUGUSTA AND RICHMOND COUNTY saw new investment and new jobs created in 2009, and other parts of the East Central region are anticipating construction of new nuclear reactors at Plant Vogtle or new biomass facilities. But many communities are looking to the arts and tourism to help them pull through some tough times.

"We are very mindful that a lot of the counties that surround us contribute to our economy," says Walter Sprouse, director of the Development Authority of Richmond County. "2009 was bad for a lot of people and it did affect us, but not as much as a lot of other places. We did about \$76



million in new investment and created 1,025 new jobs in Augusta-Richmond County."

He attributes Augusta's ability to survive recessions to its diversity. In addition to the huge medical establishment, military, Plant Vogtle and Savannah River Site, the Augusta area has a good variety of manufacturers. The city was 23rd on *Business Week's* list of the 40 strongest municipal economies in the United States last year, and No. 5 on *Forbes'* "Best Bang for the Buck" cities, where the cost of living and doing business is low.

But, Sprouse says, the December unemployment rate of 9.2 was far too