Three Norcross industries are making national headlines. One promises state-of-the-art logistics for moving product in the Southeast. A second boasts cutting-edge energy technology and a third changes the landscape of the U.S. container industry.

Suniva, manufacturer of high-efficiency solar cells, is making a name for itself producing solar-generated energy to power homes, creating clean energy jobs and reducing carbon dioxide emissions. In 2010, this Norcross business increased its megawatt capacity with a third manufacturing line and was honored that year for the world’s best commercially applied energy technology by Platts Global Energy Awards. Suniva plans to invest up to $15 million at its Norcross plant as it rolls out an enhanced solar cell product.

Boost volume capacity and improve speed are the goals of the fastest-growing business segment of the FedEx Corporation, FedEx Ground, and they are realizing that goal in Norcross. The segment’s new 215,000 square-foot facility will feature the latest automated technology, designed to process 15,000 packages per hour and dispatch as many as 75 pickup and delivery vans each day.

Long-time Norcross corporate citizen RockTenn Company flexed its industry muscle with the acquisition of Chicago-based Smurfit-Stone Container Corporation. With the $3.5 billion purchase, RockTenn will become number two in production in North America for making containers and Coated Recycled Board (CRB). RockTenn will retain Norcross as its international headquarters.

Norcross is proud of its corporate citizens and ready to help them make even more headlines.
Incorporated in 1870. In 1869, Atlanta entrepreneur J.J. Thrasher purchased 250 acres around the first stop north along the proposed Richmond Danville rail lines, and a year later, the area was incorporated. Thrasher named the new town for his good friend and fellow entrepreneur, Jonathan Norcross, who was also the fourth mayor of Atlanta.

A Summertime Retreat. In its early days, Norcross became known as “Atlanta’s Favorite Summer Resort,” a destination for residents who rode the train north to escape the hot dry summer conditions of the city. Here, they could enjoy lakeside camping or stay at one of the town’s three luxury hotels. Norcross was a thriving community whose economic growth was fueled by area farms and mercantile business, and the mainstay presence of the trains.

The Norcross Nuggets. In years past, Norcross was known for its baseball team, The Norcross Nuggets. Norcross is said to have produced more professional baseball players per capita than any other town in the nation. Four major leaguers came out of this community at a time when Norcross had a population of roughly 1,000.

Trading Route. North Peachtree Street in Norcross strides part of a ridge that served as the dividing line between Creek and Cherokee tribal territories 200 years ago. The ridge was a well-traveled trading path leading to the Chattahoochee River. In the early 1800s, the path was reportedly called “Pitch Tree Road” after all the pine trees in the area, which the Indians used to get pitch to seal their canoes. Later, the road became known as “Peachtree Road.”

Norcross and Gwinnett County. Both have experienced record growth. Norcross population, from the 2000 census to 2009, has grown 30 percent, adding 2,536 people. Likewise, Gwinnett County grew 35 percent in the same period.
A PLACE TO IMAGINE

The community and city leadership of Norcross have brought to life a slogan that is reflected in the activities of the city, the merchants and homeowners, and the diverse arts community. “A Place to Imagine” is not just a catchy phrase; it is a way of thinking about municipal operations, green space and the cultural arts.

Norcross first imagined itself as a place that cared about its environmental impact. With significant commitment from the volunteer-based Sustainable Norcross Commission, the city was certified green by the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) in 2010. Indeed, Norcross is one of only three metro communities that have earned silver status from the ARC for their green initiatives.

To earn the certification, the city has put in place many good ideas. It encourages that buildings achieve LEED certification, the green standard in construction, and has instituted a preference for alternative fuel and hybrid vehicles in its city fleet. Also unique to Norcross is an innovative closed loop system for residential yard debris. Grass and shrub trimmings are collected by a private company and turned into compost, mulch and soil products, which in turn are sold to the city, local businesses and residents. Plus, for many homeowners, recycling bins for household trash outnumber traditional garbage bins. Moreover, Norcross has stepped up recycling collections at all city events and festivals.

In city offices, the staff has gone virtually paperless. Digital versions of utility bills can now be distributed via email to its citizens and business customers.

If you ask Sustainable Norcross Chairwoman Connie Weathers what she is imagining next, the answer comes quickly. “We are going for the gold level with the ARC.”

Someone else in Norcross imagined a green space initiative that is taxpayer-funded by a self-imposed Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST). And today, Norcross supports seven city parks within a 4.5 square mile area so one can enjoy tree-lined green spaces like the Betty Mauldin Park, home of Georgia’s second-tallest American Elm, as well as the city’s crown jewel, the Lillian Webb Park.

The Lillian Webb Park was recently renovated with fountains, walking paths and over four acres of room to play. It is named in honor of Norcross Mayor Emeritus Lillian Webb, who was mayor from 1975 – 1984 and again from 1996 – 2007. As part of the city’s redevelopment plan, the community’s leaders are imagining this park in the hands of a developer as a potential mixed-use project between the downtown square and Buford Highway.

Norcross might easily get lost amidst the roar of metro Atlanta, but the city has truly defined itself as unique, crafted a plan and sparked its citizens’ imaginations.

Warm, sunny days bring family and friends out to play.
The arts community of Norcross is known for their imaginative expressions of music, performing arts and visual media. Thrasher Park hosts an annual outdoor concert series, and the College Street Playhouse is home to the award-winning Lionheart Theatre Company that is based at the Norcross Cultural Arts and Community Center, an 1875 vintage Methodist Church. The Norcross Arts Alliance sponsors an independent film festival, and numerous downtown merchants feature one-of-a-kind art and jewelry pieces from local artists, some of whom are creating sustainable sculpture from demolished Norcross structures. The sculptured pieces will use salvaged architectural details from historic homes. For 2010, Gwinnett Magazine named Norcross Best in Arts and Cultural Scene.

Crowds of over 50,000 attend the annual Norcross Art Fest, which has over 200 exhibitors.

Recognized for its vintage charm and trendy energy, Downtown Historic Norcross is a “happening place.” There’s live music in eclectic eateries, karaoke in the local pub, unique treasures in locally owned shops, special outdoor events and great parks, all within easy walking distance. In 2010, the Norcross city center was named Gwinnett County’s Best Downtown.

The Norcross Welcome Center is a place for locals and tourists to discover Norcross’s rich history as well as its modern attractions. Visitors to the Welcome Center can find photographs and newspapers from a time long ago, get information on where to eat, play and shop, and enjoy sponsored cultural events.