



HISTORY OF ATHENS TECHNICAL COLLEGE

The roots of postsecondary technical education in Georgia date back to 1943 when the state Board of Education approved a master plan for a system of area trade and vocational schools — the forerunners of today's technical colleges. This action led to the opening in 1944 of the first of these institutions in Clarkesville. After a second area trade and vocational school opened in Americus in 1948, the state board set aside the master plan despite the growing demand for training as a result of the mechanization of Georgia's agricultural economy and the rapid expansion of manufacturing throughout the state. The abandonment of the master plan would leave Clarkesville and Americus as the only locations of area trade and vocational schools in Georgia for the next ten years.

By the mid-1950s, W. M. Hicks, superintendent for trade and industrial education for the state Board of Education, was convinced that the economic future of Georgia depended on the availability of a trained workforce. Heeding the advice of Mr. Hicks, the state board revisited the issue of postsecondary vocational education in Georgia. After extensive deliberation, the board adopted a new set of policies in 1958 to open additional institutions throughout the state.

Two communities — one in Northeast Georgia and the other in Southwest Georgia — quickly responded to the actions of the state Board of Education by opening new institutions later that year. The Clarke County School District opened one of these institutions and named it Athens Area Vocational-Technical School, a name that would remain in place for the next 29 years. The institution opened in former army barracks on Pope Street in downtown Athens. Growth in enrollment would lead to the opening of an additional location in Winterville.

Approval of a school bond referendum by the citizens of Clarke County in the mid-1960s allowed Robert G. Shelnutt, the first director of the institution, to consolidate the Pope Street and Winterville operations at a permanent campus on U.S. Highway 29, three miles north of downtown Athens. This facility opened in 1966. At the time, Athens Area Vocational-Technical School offered only 13 programs of study.

Mr. Shelnutt would oversee two expansions of the U.S. Highway 29 campus before his retirement in 1985. A 1970-1971 construction project funded by Clarke County, the State of Georgia, and the Economic Development Administration doubled the size of the campus facilities, which in turn, provided space to introduce 10 additional programs. Another expansion in 1980 provided modern facilities for instructional programs in business education, electronic data processing, and electromechanical engineering technology. The 1980 construction project expanded campus facilities to more than 155,000 square feet of classrooms, laboratories, shops, and administrative offices.

During his 27-year stewardship, Mr. Shelnutt established a foundation that would enable the next generation of leaders to expand Athens Area Vocational-Technical School into one of the premier institutions of this type in Georgia.

The election of Joe Frank Harris as governor planted the seed for educational reform in Georgia. Governor

Harris established the Georgia Vocational Education Task Force shortly after his inauguration in 1983. The governor charged the task force with the responsibility of identifying ways to improve the governance structure, funding, and quality of the area vocational-technical schools. Acting on the recommendations of the task force, Governor Harris issued an executive order in 1984 to create the Georgia Board of Postsecondary Vocational Education. This order set in motion a long-term plan to consolidate the governance of area vocational-technical schools under this new state entity.

Just as Athens Area Vocational-Technical School was one of the first two institutions to open under the 1958 policies adopted by the state Board of Education, it was one of the first five institutions to transition to state governance in 1986. This change in governance led to the renaming of the school in 1987 to Athens Area Technical Institute. The transition to state governance also led to the creation of a local board of directors. Board members are liaisons between the institution and the counties it serves. The board of directors consists of representatives from business, industry, and economic development from the service area, which includes Clarke, Elbert, Greene, Hart, Madison, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Taliaferro, Walton, and Wilkes counties.

The transition to state governance also led to the changing of the title of Dr. Kenneth C. Easom, the successor to Mr. Shelnett, from director to president. Dr. Easom guided the institution through a period of significant growth and change during his 18-year tenure as chief executive officer. Under his leadership, Athens Area Technical Institute was the first technical institute not governed by or connected to the Georgia Board of Regents, the governing entity of the state's university system, to earn accreditation as a two-year college from the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

This level of accreditation afforded the institution the opportunity to become the first technical institute in Georgia to receive approval from the Georgia Board of Nursing to develop an associate degree program designed to prepare students for licensure as registered nurses. The first class of students entered this program in 1991. Athens Area Technical Institute also was the first institution in the newly emerging state system to offer an associate degree program in paralegal studies. Dr. Easom added these unique programs to a comprehensive array of program offerings that included the only program designed to prepare students as laboratory assistants in the many private, state, and federal research and biotechnology laboratories moving to the area.

The institution assumed responsibility for providing adult education programs in the service area during Dr. Easom's tenure as president. This transfer of management responsibility occurred in July 1989. These adult education programs include basic reading and math classes, English as a Second Language courses, Tests of General Educational Development (GED) preparation courses, and workplace literacy classes. The institution holds GED testing sessions at the campuses in Clarke, Elbert, Greene, and Walton counties and at locations in Hart and Wilkes counties. The institution operates adult education centers in all service area counties. Students may participate in a full range of adult education classes at these centers. Residents also may obtain information from staff at these centers about the programs and services offered by the college.

Dr. Easom also oversaw the first expansion of campus facilities in 15 years. In 1995, a 34,000 square-foot facility opened on the north end of the Athens Campus. It contains a lecture hall, the library, and administrative offices. The opening of this facility coincided with the opening in September

1995 of the Walton County Technical Education Center. This center was originally housed in a 7,500 square-foot facility located in the Walton Plaza in Monroe.

As part of the 1995 expansion, the institution held groundbreaking ceremonies in April for the Elbert County Campus. Elberton executive Frank Coggins donated nearly 43 acres of land 1.1 miles west of Elberton on Georgia Highway 72 for the new campus. The 37,000 square-foot academic building contains 14 classrooms, two laboratories, a lecture hall, and a library. The 10,000-square-foot classroom building contains six classrooms, an adult education laboratory, and faculty offices. A 7,000 square-foot facility originally contained a child

development center and classroom space for the Early Childhood Care and Education program. Today, this building serves as a hub for the college to provide customized education and training for companies located in Elbert County and the surrounding region. The 3,900 square-foot auxiliary services building originally housed a bookstore and student center. Today it serves as a public safety building in which the college offers academic programs of study in Criminal Justice Technology, Emergency Medical Technician, and Fire Science Technology. Dedication ceremonies for the Elbert County Campus occurred on September 11, 1997.

Another dedication ceremony — this time for a technical education center in Greene County — followed the Elbert County ceremony 10 months later in July 1998. The Greene County Board of Commissioners, local businesses and industries, and a community development block grant from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs provided the funding needed to construct a 10,000 square-foot facility; the Greene County Development Authority provided land for the center.

Two years after opening the Greene County Center, the college acquired 10 additional acres of land and an 8,000 square-foot building directly across U.S. Highway 29 from the Athens Campus. This facility housed an adult education laboratory and classrooms and laboratory spaces for the plumbing program of study. It now serves as a Quick Start Training Center for the Caterpillar plant located in Athens.

The Georgia General Assembly passed House Bill 1187 — the A+ Education Reform Act — during the 2000 session. Signed into law by Governor Roy Barnes, the A+ Act authorized a name change for the publicly funded technical institutions in the state. A ceremony on July 6, 2000, brought Lieutenant Governor Mark Taylor to Athens to officially change the institution's name to Athens Technical College.

The college began the new millennium with a name that more accurately reflected the scope of services available to the citizens of Northeast Georgia. The name change also led to an immediate increase in the number of students who enrolled in classes. Enrollment increased by 27.9 percent during the first year the college operated under the name Athens Technical College.

Growing enrollment led to the need for additional space on the Athens Campus. Dr. Easom worked to obtain funding for a new Business and Technology building before retiring in 2002. Construction on the 41,000 square-foot Business and Technology building began in May 2003. The building, which is located on the north end of the Athens Campus, opened in January 2005 and includes 18 classrooms, a lecture hall, instructional technology and computer network centers, and offices for faculty in the Division of Business and Education.

Dr. Flora Tydings arrived from Central Georgia Technical College to serve as the third chief executive of Athens Technical College in August 2003. Dr. Tydings launched the first capital campaign to be undertaken by the institution and its affiliate foundation shortly after arriving in Athens.

Dr. Tydings also guided the college through a process to expand the programs and services available at the technical education centers in Greene and Walton counties. The college now offers academic programs of study, training programs for business and industry, a comprehensive schedule of community education courses, and adult education classes at these locations. The Greene County Board of Commissioners renovated a portion of the existing facility in 2008 to accommodate this expansion.

The college moved the Walton County Center into larger facilities in the old Monroe Area High School building on Bryant Road. The college changed the designation of the facility to a campus and renamed it the Walton County Campus. The Walton County Career Academy was also housed in this facility.

The career academy partnership was one of six initiatives funded by the Technical College System of Georgia through the Georgia Career Academy Project, a state initiative designed to expand existing career academies and to open additional academies throughout Georgia. The \$500,000 grant was used to renovate one wing of the Walton facility to allow the college to introduce its Biotechnology program at that campus.

The 2008-2009 academic year marked the beginning of another period of growth for the college. Construction began on the Athens Campus of a new \$15.4 million, 67,500 square-foot facility for the college's Life Sciences programs. Health care is identified as one of the state's strategic industries and responds to the goals set forth by the Commission for a New Georgia for a healthier, safer, and more educated Georgia. The facility opened in March 2010.

During this same time frame, architects finished drawings for a \$4.5 million, 26,555 square-foot facility on the college's Elbert County Campus. This facility was designed to enable the college to introduce new programs in Diesel Electronics Technology and Welding and Joining Technology and expand the Industrial Systems Technology program. Groundbreaking ceremonies for the facility were held in September 2009, with construction starting shortly thereafter. This facility opened for Spring Quarter 2011.

The college also received a \$2.9 million grant in December 2008 from the Technical College System of Georgia to construct a career academy in conjunction with the Clarke County School District, the University of Georgia, and the OneAthens anti-poverty initiative. The career academy was constructed at the school district's H. T. Edwards facility, which is located off Broad Street in Athens. The Edwards site was redeveloped to house a number of school district programs, including its highly successful performance learning center. The career academy opened in August 2011.

Athens Technical College is one of just 30 community colleges nationwide to receive an invitation to join the 2011 cohort of Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count. Athens Technical College is the first institution in Georgia to participate in this national effort aimed at improving student success, closing achievement gaps, and increasing students' persistence and graduation rates. As an Achieving the Dream college, Athens Technical College undertook an in-depth quantitative and qualitative analysis of its strengths, problem areas, and achievement gaps. This analysis provided the foundation to redesign learning support coursework and to introduce a first-semester seminar class. In addition to Athens Technical College, the 2011 cohort includes community colleges in California, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Washington.

Athens Technical College and three other colleges in Georgia received funding to redesign learning support coursework as part of a \$1 million grant from Complete College America in 2011. Athens Technical College joined Georgia Piedmont Technical College, the College of Coastal Georgia, and Georgia Gwinnett College to pilot innovative remediation programs in which students complete technology-based diagnostic assessments to determine the level of remediation required for each student.

Athens Technical College joined its sister institutions in the Technical College System of Georgia in converting from the quarter-based academic calendar to the semester-based academic calendar beginning with Fall Semester 2011. In preparation for this transition, program faculty worked with the membership of their program advisory committees and with their peers at technical colleges across Georgia to redesign the curriculum. The redesign process ensured that the programs included instruction and content on topics relevant to the twenty-first century.

Dr. Andrea Daniel assumed the role of Athens Technical College's fourth president on April 1, 2016. She previously held the position of Executive Vice President at the college. Her over 24-year career at Athens Technical College in various roles provides her with a unique perspective and vision for the future of the college. Dr. Daniel has also worked as a senior planning analyst for the Atlanta Regional Commission. She holds a doctorate in Business Administration from Northcentral University, an M.A. in Public Administration from the

University of Georgia, and a B.A. in political science from Lander University. She has completed additional training in economic development and is a graduate of the L.E.A.D. Athens Class of 2008.

Under Dr. Daniel's leadership, Athens Technical College was named Achieving the Dream 2017 Leader College. Achieving the Dream (ATD) is a national nonprofit leader in championing evidence-based institutional improvement. Athens Technical College is the first college in Georgia to join ATD and one of two technical college in the state to earn the Leader College distinction. The honor is awarded to colleges within the Achieving the Dream National Network that have shown three consecutive years of improvement in outcomes that measure student success.

Dr. Daniel's leadership led the college to complete a comprehensive renovation of the Athens Technical College Library in 2017. The enrollment at the college continues to increase with eleven consecutive enrollment increases since Dr. Daniel became president. In 2018, Dr. Daniel gained approval for the completion of a \$8.2 million Agriculture Science Building on the Elbert Campus of Athens Technical College. In addition to Agriculture Science, other programs to be offered in this new facility include Horticulture, Poultry, and Animal Science. A new program, Conservation Law, in partnership with the Department of Natural Resources, was added.

In late 2019, under the direction of Dr. Daniel, the college constructed a new visitor center and college entrance. This project enhanced the visitor and prospective students experience at Athens Technical College.

In January 2020, Dr. Daniel was elected and nominated by a group of her peers to serve on the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commissions on Colleges (SACSCOC) Board of Trustees. For her efforts in demonstrating excellence, creativity, and success in business and furthering the goals for other professional women, Dr. Daniel was presented the Athena Award in February 2020. The Athena Award is presented annually to a person who embodies the highest level of professional excellence in her or his business or profession, devotes time and energy to improve quality of life for others in the community, and actively assists women in realizing their leadership potential.

In FY2020, under Dr. Daniel's leadership, Athens Technical College was approved to design a new Industrial Systems / Economic Development Building. The building's project cost was \$18,000,000. This 39,000 square-foot building included programs HVAC/Air Conditioning Technology, Industrial Systems, and Mechatronics, as well as Economic Development manufacturing training space. This new capital outlay project was a much-needed addition in order to serve the manufacturing companies in the region and the State of Georgia.

Significant Growth - In March 2022, Dr. Andrea D. Daniel received the Shirley B. Gordan Award of Distinction from the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. The Walton Campus of Athens Technical College Nursing Program Ribbon Cutting was held In December 2022. During this time, Dr. Andrea D. Daniel was re-elected to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for a second three-year term. A dedication and ribbon cutting ceremony was held to officially open the Tom McCall Agriculture Complex on the Elbert County Campus in March 2023. The Industrial Systems / Economic Development building was opened during a ceremony held

in December 2023.

In October 2024, Governor Kemp appointed Dr. Daniel to serve as a board of trustees member on the Georgia's Driver's Education Commission.

Athens Technical College and Brenau University signed an articulation agreement in April 2026 to allow ATC Nursing and Health Information Management Technology graduates seamlessly transition to Brenau and continue their BSN and BBA in Healthcare Management. More information regarding the articulation agreement can be found here: [Athens Technical College partners with Brenau University for Nursing & Health Information Management Technology Articulation Agreement - Athens Technical College](#).

Dr. Daniel led a groundbreaking for the construction and renovation of the Athens Technical College Walton Campus in May 2026. This Phase I and Phase II project totaled \$19 million and includes the design of a new Welding Facility and renovation of the current campus.