

## Civic Involvement

# Executive Integration

Establish yourself and your company  
through community leadership

*By Jennifer Levine Hartz*

In December 1991, when United Parcel Service decided to relocate its headquarters from Connecticut to Atlanta, Oz Nelson, then chairman and CEO, was merely looking for a place where people wanted to live – nice climate, affordable housing, good schools, great airport. On his second day in his new office, former Georgia Gov. George Busbee called to see if they could meet. Two days later, Oz Nelson was asked to chair the Georgia Chamber of Commerce.

Nelson turned down the opportunity, but the message was heard loud and clear: Georgia's business and community leadership was eager for new talent to apply themselves and their organizations to addressing the region's challenges.

After getting advice from a local developer, Nelson pursued his passion, an active leadership role in the United Way of Metro Atlanta. But his volunteer service did not end there. Within five years, Nelson was on a wide variety of boards: a social-services agency called The Bridge; the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce Education Committee; EduPac, a political action committee supporting school board candidates; a venerable business organization called the Commerce Club; and others. It was through these roles that Nelson quickly became a major figure in local, regional and national business.

“At that time, we were re-examining the mission of UPS and realized that we had responsibilities in several areas beyond shareholder value,” he says. “We needed to serve employees and communities just like we did our customers. My volunteer leadership at United Way and other places set an important example for everyone at the company.” He believes that community organizations are the perfect place to create and continue important business relationships – and that opportunity for involvement abounds in Atlanta and other cities.



Other executives have moved to Atlanta and followed his example. Within five years of her arrival, Paula Rosput, CEO of AGL Resources, held important board positions with the United Way of Metro Atlanta, the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, the Commerce Club and the Atlanta Women's Foundation. John Rice, president and CEO of GE Power Systems, came to Atlanta in 2001 with the relocation of his company. Now, he is involved with Hands On Atlanta, Emory Healthcare, Georgia Tech and the Walker School. He chairs the education committee at the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and is slated to chair the chamber in 2004.

This is one of Atlanta's economic development secrets. Its highly engaged business community is appealing to companies and executives considering relocating to the area. It is critical to the region's growth and health that the next wave of corporate immigrants continues to take up the mantle of volunteer leadership.

Tom McInerney, CEO of ING US Financial Services, just moved to Atlanta. He, too, sees the value of community involvement. He is a board member of the National Conference for Community and Justice and the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce's Forward Atlanta Committee. Yvette Bowden, ING's head of community relations and inclusion, says, "even though Tom's job requires a great deal of travel, he is certainly excited to meet his peers and follow his passions through community involvement."

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## New to Town? Five Ways to Get Plugged in

If you are new to Atlanta, here's how to get involved:

1. Consider your passions – what causes inspire or ignite you?
2. Talk with your company's community relations professional about your goals
3. Talk with other executives in your company, your industry, and your geography
4. Click on [www.handsonatlanta.com](http://www.handsonatlanta.com) to experiment with hundreds of opportunities
5. Apply to one of the Board Member training programs: VIP (through United Way), Board Builders (through the Georgia Center for Nonprofits), or Women on Board (through the Atlanta Women's Foundation).

Note: There are similar programs in other cities that can help corporate transplants fit into their new environment in a hurry.