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Georgia Downtown Association Honors Rocco's Ristorante at the Theatre with Outstanding Historic Preservation Award

ATLANTA, Ga., -- The Georgia Downtown Association (GDA) has recognized Rocco's Ristorante at the Theatre in Moultrie with its 2026 Outstanding Historic Preservation Award during the GDA Annual Conference in Rome. The award recognizes transformative preservation projects that bring new life to historic buildings through thoughtful rehabilitation, adaptive reuse, and a commitment to preserving a community's unique character and history.

Owned and operated by Susana and Alan Torres, Rocco's Ristorante at the Theatre transformed the historic Colquitt Theatre building into a thriving dining destination and community gathering space while honoring the building's rich legacy. Through careful rehabilitation and a commitment to preserving the structure's historic elements, the project has created a vibrant new chapter for one of Downtown Moultrie's most treasured landmarks.

"Historic preservation is about more than saving buildings—it is about preserving the stories, memories, and character that make communities unique," said Jason Ford, president of the Georgia Downtown Association. "Rocco's Ristorante at the Theatre is a remarkable example of how adaptive reuse can honor the past while creating new opportunities for economic development and community connection. The Torres family's commitment to preserving the character of this historic building while creating a thriving downtown destination represents the very best of preservation-driven revitalization."

The project began with a shared vision between the Torres family and community partners to create a permanent home for the successful Rocco's Italian Streetfood concept while contributing to Downtown Moultrie's ongoing revitalization. Working alongside the Moultrie Downtown Development Authority and the UGA Small Business Development Center, Susana and Alan Torres transformed the former theatre space into a welcoming restaurant and event venue that balances historic character with modern functionality.

Originally constructed as the Colquitt Theatre, the building served as a beloved entertainment venue and community gathering place for generations. After a devastating fire destroyed the original structure in 1956, the theatre was rebuilt and continued serving the community for decades before later becoming the Senior Center. When the building became vacant in 2020, the City of Moultrie and Downtown Development Authority worked to identify a new use that would preserve the building's importance while bringing renewed activity to downtown.

Throughout the renovation process, the Torres family prioritized preserving the building's historic identity. The original exterior "COLQUITT" sign was carefully repurposed as a centerpiece within the restaurant's special event space, allowing visitors to continue connecting with the building's history. Original brick walls were exposed, structural beams were highlighted to showcase where the theatre balcony once stood, and historic movie poster display cases were preserved and incorporated into the restaurant's design.

Today, Rocco's Ristorante at the Theatre serves as a successful example of adaptive reuse, contributing to Downtown Moultrie's economic vitality while creating a place where residents and visitors can gather. The project has created more than 25 jobs, attracted visitors to downtown, supported community events, and provided a versatile space for dining, celebrations, and shared experiences.

The transformation of Rocco's Ristorante at the Theatre demonstrates the power of historic preservation to create lasting community impact. By honoring the building's past while investing in its future, Susana and Alan Torres have restored a historic landmark into a vibrant downtown asset that strengthens Moultrie's identity and continues the building's legacy as a place where the community comes together.

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About the Georgia Downtown Association (GDA): Established in 1999, the Georgia Downtown Association is the state's premier organization dedicated to supporting professionals and communities working to create vibrant, economically healthy downtowns through education, networking, advocacy, and professional development.