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SYNOVUS FINANCIAL CORP  
Form DEF 14A  
March 12, 2002

SCHEDULE 14A INFORMATION

Proxy Statement Pursuant to Section 14(a) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934  
(Amendment No. )

Filed by the Registrant [X]

Filed by a Party other than the Registrant [ ]

Check the appropriate box:

- [ ] Preliminary Proxy Statement  
[ ] Confidential, for use of the Commission Only  
(as permitted by Rule 14a-6(e)(2))  
[X] Definitive Proxy Statement  
[ ] Definitive Additional Materials  
[ ] Soliciting Material Pursuant to Section  
240.14a-12

Synovus Financial Corp.

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(Name of Registrant as Specified In Its Charter)

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(Name of Person(s) Filing Proxy Statement if other than the Registrant)

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- [X] No fee required  
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1) Title of each class of securities to which transaction applies:

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1) Amount Previously Paid:

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[LOGO] (R)

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SYNOVUS (R)

JAMES H. BLANCHARD  
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

March 14, 2002

Dear Shareholder:

You are cordially invited to attend our Annual Meeting of Shareholders at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, April 24, 2002, in the South Hall of the Columbus, Georgia Convention & Trade Center. Enclosed with this Proxy Statement are your proxy card and the 2001 Annual Report.

We hope that you will be able to be with us and let us give you a review of 2001. Whether you own a few or many shares of stock and whether or not you plan to attend in person, it is important that your shares be voted on matters that come before the meeting. To make sure your shares are represented, we urge you to vote promptly.

Thank you for helping us make 2001 a good year. We look forward to your continued support in 2002 and another good year.

Sincerely yours,  
/s/James H. Blanchard  
JAMES H. BLANCHARD

Synovus Financial Corp. Post Office Box 120 Columbus, Georgia 31902-0120

SYNOVUS (R)

NOTICE OF THE 2002 ANNUAL MEETING OF SHAREHOLDERS

TIME..... 10:00 a.m. E.T.  
Wednesday, April 24, 2002

PLACE..... South Hall  
Columbus, Georgia Convention & Trade Center  
801 Front Avenue  
Columbus, Georgia 31901

- ITEMS OF BUSINESS.. (1) To elect eight directors to serve until the Annual Meeting of Shareholders in 2005.
- (2) To approve the Synovus Financial Corp.2002 Long-Term Incentive Plan.
- (3) To transact such other business as may properly come before the meeting and any adjournment thereof.

WHO MAY VOTE..... You can vote if you were a shareholder of record on February 15, 2002.

ANNUAL REPORT..... A copy of the Annual Report is enclosed.

PROXY VOTING..... Your vote is important. Please vote in one of these ways:

- (1) Use the toll-free telephone number shown on the proxy card;

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- (2) Visit the web site listed on your proxy card;
- (3) Mark, sign, date and promptly return the enclosed proxy card in the postage-paid envelope provided; or
- (4) Submit a ballot at the Annual Meeting.

/s/G. Sanders Griffith, III  
G. SANDERS GRIFFITH, III  
Secretary

Columbus, Georgia  
March 14, 2002

YOUR VOTE IS IMPORTANT. WHETHER OR NOT YOU PLAN TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL MEETING, PLEASE VOTE YOUR SHARES PROMPTLY.

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PROXY STATEMENT  
VOTING INFORMATION

PURPOSE

This Proxy Statement and the accompanying proxy card are being mailed to Synovus shareholders beginning March 14, 2002. The Synovus Board of Directors is soliciting proxies to be used at the 2002 Annual Meeting of Synovus Shareholders which will be held on April 24, 2002, at 10:00 a.m., in the South Hall of the Columbus, Georgia Convention & Trade Center. Proxies are solicited to give all shareholders of record an opportunity to vote on matters to be presented at the

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Annual Meeting. In the following pages of this Proxy Statement, you will find information on matters to be voted upon at the Annual Meeting of Shareholders or any adjournment of that meeting.

### WHO CAN VOTE

You are entitled to vote if you were a shareholder of record of Synovus stock as of the close of business on February 15, 2002. Your shares can be voted at the meeting only if you are present or represented by a valid proxy.

### SHARES OUTSTANDING

A majority of the votes entitled to be cast by the holders of the outstanding shares of Synovus stock must be present, either in person or represented by proxy, in order to conduct the Annual Meeting of Synovus Shareholders. On February 15, 2002, 294,807,278 shares of Synovus stock were outstanding.

### PROXY CARD

The Board has designated two individuals to serve as proxies to vote the shares represented by proxies at the Annual Meeting of Shareholders.

If you sign the proxy card but do not specify how you want your shares to be voted, your shares will be voted by the designated proxies in favor of the election of all of the director nominees and in accordance with the directors' recommendations on the other proposal listed on the proxy card. The designated proxies will vote in their discretion on any other matter that may properly come before the meeting. At the date the Proxy Statement went to press, we did not anticipate that any other matters would be raised at the Annual Meeting.

### VOTING OF SHARES

Holders of Synovus stock are entitled to ten votes on each matter submitted to a vote of shareholders for each share of Synovus stock owned on February 15, 2002 which: (i) has had the same owner since February 15, 1998; (ii) was acquired by reason of participation in a dividend reinvestment plan offered by Synovus and is held by the same owner who acquired it under such plan; (iii) is held by the same owner to whom it was issued as a result of an acquisition of a company or business by Synovus where the resolutions adopted by Synovus' Board of Directors approving the acquisition specifically grant ten votes per share; (iv) was acquired under any employee, officer and/or director benefit plan maintained for one or more employees, officers and/or directors of Synovus and/or its subsidiaries, and is held by the same owner for whom it was acquired under any such plan; (v) is held by the same owner to whom it was issued by Synovus, or to whom it was transferred by Synovus from treasury shares, and the resolutions adopted by Synovus' Board of Directors approving such issuance and/or transfer specifically grant ten votes per share; (vi) was acquired as a direct result of a stock split, stock dividend or other type of share distribution if the share as to which it was distributed was acquired prior to, and has been held by the same owner since, February 15, 1998; (vii) has been owned continuously by the same shareholder for a period of 48 consecutive months prior to the record date of any

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meeting of shareholders at which the share is eligible to be voted; or (viii) is owned by a holder who, in addition to shares which are owned under the provisions of (i)-(vii) above, is the owner of less than 1,139,063 shares of Synovus stock (which amount has been appropriately adjusted to reflect stock splits and with such amount to be appropriately adjusted to properly reflect any other change in Synovus stock by means of a stock split, a stock dividend, a recapitalization or otherwise). Shareholders of shares of Synovus stock not

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described above are entitled to one vote per share for each share. The actual voting power of each holder of shares of Synovus stock will be based on information possessed by Synovus at the time of the Annual Meeting.

As Synovus stock is registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission and is traded on the New York Stock Exchange, Synovus stock is subject to the provisions of an NYSE rule which, in general, prohibits a company's common stock and equity securities from being authorized or remaining authorized for trading on the NYSE if the company issues securities or takes other corporate action that would have the effect of nullifying, restricting or disparately reducing the voting rights of existing shareholders of the company. However, the rule contains a "grandfather" provision, under which Synovus' ten vote provision falls, which, in general, permits grandfathered disparate voting rights plans to continue to operate as adopted. The number of votes that each shareholder will be entitled to exercise at the Annual Meeting will depend upon whether each share held by the shareholder meets the requirements which entitle one share of Synovus stock to ten votes on each matter submitted to a vote of shareholders. Shareholders of Synovus stock must complete the Certification on the proxy in order for any of the shares represented by the proxy to be entitled to ten votes per share. All shares entitled to vote and represented in person or by properly completed proxies received before the polls are closed at the Annual Meeting, and not revoked or superceded, will be voted in accordance with instructions indicated on those proxies.

SHAREHOLDERS WHO DO NOT CERTIFY ON THEIR PROXY CARDS THAT THEY ARE ENTITLED TO TEN VOTES PER SHARE WILL BE ENTITLED TO ONLY ONE VOTE PER SHARE.

Synovus Dividend Reinvestment and Direct Stock Purchase Plan: If you participate in this Plan, your proxy card represents shares held in the Plan, as well as shares you hold directly in certificate form registered in the same name.

### REQUIRED VOTES - ELECTION OF DIRECTOR NOMINEES

Directors are elected by a plurality of the votes, which means the eight nominees who receive the largest number of properly executed votes will be elected as directors. Cumulative voting is not permitted. Shares that are represented by proxies which are marked "withhold authority" for the election of one or more director nominees will not be counted in determining the number of votes cast for those persons.

### REQUIRED VOTES - OTHER MATTERS

The affirmative vote of a majority of the votes cast (in person or by proxy and entitled to vote at the Annual Meeting) is needed to approve the Synovus 2002 Long-Term Incentive Plan.

### TABULATION OF VOTES

Under certain circumstances, brokers are prohibited from exercising discretionary authority for beneficial owners who have not returned proxies to the brokers (so-called "broker non-votes"). In such cases, and in cases where the shareholder abstains from voting on a matter, those shares will be counted for the purpose of determining if a quorum is present, but will not be included in the vote totals with respect to those matters and, therefore, will have no effect on the vote. In addition, if a broker indicates on the proxy card that it does not have discretionary authority on other matters considered at the meeting, those shares will not be counted in determining the number of votes cast with respect to those matters.

### HOW YOU CAN VOTE

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You may vote by proxy or in person at the meeting. To vote by proxy, you may select one of the following options:

### Vote By Telephone:

You can vote your shares by telephone by calling the toll-free telephone number (at no cost to you) shown on your proxy card. Telephone voting is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Easy-to-follow voice prompts allow you to vote your shares and confirm that your instructions have been properly recorded. Our telephone voting procedures are designed to authenticate the shareholder by using individual control numbers. If you vote by telephone, you do NOT need to return your proxy card.

### Vote By Internet:

You can also choose to vote on the Internet. The web site for Internet voting is shown on your proxy card. Internet voting is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You will be given the opportunity to confirm that your instructions have been properly recorded, and you can consent to view future proxy statements and annual reports on the Internet instead of receiving them in the mail. If you vote on the Internet, you do NOT need to return your proxy card.

### Vote By Mail:

If you choose to vote by mail, simply mark your proxy card, date and sign it, sign the Certification and return it in the postage-paid envelope provided.

### REVOCAION OF PROXY

If you vote by proxy, you may revoke that proxy at any time before it is voted at the meeting. You may do this by (a) signing another proxy card with a later date and returning it to us prior to the meeting, (b) voting again by telephone or on the Internet prior to the meeting, or (c) attending the meeting in person and casting a ballot.

### COLUMBUS BANK AND TRUST COMPANY AND TOTAL SYSTEM SERVICES, INC.

Synovus is the owner of all of the issued and outstanding shares of common stock of Columbus Bank and Trust Company(R) ("Columbus Bank"). Columbus Bank owns individually 81.1% of the outstanding shares of Total System Services, Inc.(R) ("TSYS(R)"), an electronic transaction processing company.

### ELECTION OF DIRECTORS

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS UNANIMOUSLY RECOMMENDS THAT YOU VOTE "FOR" ALL NOMINEES.

### NUMBER

At the date of this Proxy Statement, the Board of Directors of Synovus consists of 18 members. As 20 board seats have been authorized by Synovus' shareholders, Synovus has two directorships which remain vacant. These vacant directorships could be filled in the future at the discretion of Synovus' Board of Directors. This discretionary power gives Synovus' Board of Directors the flexibility of appointing new directors in the periods between Synovus' Annual Meetings should suitable candidates come to its attention. The Board is divided into three classes whose terms are staggered so that the term of one class expires at each Annual Meeting of Shareholders. The terms of office of the Class I directors expire at the 2004 Annual Meeting, the terms of office of the Class II directors expire at the 2002 Annual Meeting and the terms of office of the

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Class III directors expire at the 2003 Annual Meeting. Eight director nominees have been nominated for election as Class II directors at this meeting. Proxies cannot be voted at the 2002 Annual Meeting for a greater number of persons than the number of nominees named.

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### NOMINEES

The following nominees have been selected by the Corporate Governance Committee and approved by the Board for submission to the shareholders: Daniel P. Amos, Richard W. Anthony, Joe E. Beverly, Walter M. Deriso, Jr., Elizabeth R. James, Mason H. Lampton, Elizabeth C. Ogie and Melvin T. Stith.

The Board believes that each director nominee will be able to stand for election. If any nominee becomes unable to stand for election, proxies in favor of that nominee will be voted in favor of the remaining nominees and in favor of any substitute nominee named by the Board upon the recommendation of the Corporate Governance Committee. If you do not wish your shares voted for one or more of the nominees, you may so indicate on the proxy.

### MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Following is the principal occupation, age and certain other information for each director nominee and other directors serving unexpired terms.

| Name | Age | Synovus<br>Director<br>Classifi-<br>cation | Year<br>First<br>Elected<br>Director | Principal Occupation<br>and Other Information |
|------|-----|--|--------------------------------------|---|
|------|-----|--|--------------------------------------|---|

Daniel P. Amos