February 15, 2017 was chilly and brisk; nonetheless, the day was full of beautiful bright sunshine. About 60 River Valley Regional Commission Area Agency on Aging (RVRC AAA) seniors appeared to dismiss the cold weather as they eagerly toured the State Capitol. They were able to sit in on the Georgia General Assembly to listen as State Representatives discussed policies and introduced new laws. Afterwards, seniors took pictures with Georgia State Representative Carolyn Hughley of Columbus, State Representative Patty Bentley of Taylor County and Senator Ed Harbison of Columbus. RVRC AAA employees, Gail Simpson and Marie Peterson, had the pleasure of briefly speaking with Georgia State Representative Debbie Buckner of Talbot County. As Senior Day came to a close, seniors visited service vendors in the Capitol’s South Rotunda where they were given lunch and important literature to help enlighten and assist them with making crucial decisions regarding healthy living, exercise, nutrition, aging, and other matters relating to their welfare.

IN THIS ISSUE:

Executive Director’s Note ………… 2
Paxen Learning Center ………………… 2
Staff Spotlight ……………………….. 3
Peach Ridge Arts Fest ………………… 3
GeorgiaCares ………………………. 4
Educational Outreach ………………… 4
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy ………………… 4
Revolving Loan Fund ………………… 4
Retirement Recognition ……………….. 5
Scrap Tire Amnesty Events ………… 5
Georgia Safe Routes to School ……… 6
WIOA Accomplishments ……………. 6
Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) ………………… 7
GeorgiaCares Events ………………… 7
City of Oglethorpe Cemetery Mapping ………………… 7
Georgia Trails Summit ………………… 8

- May is Older American’s Month
- May is National Bike Month
- May 5th Wellness Walk
- May 14th is Mother’s Day
- May 19th is National Bike to Work Day
- May 20th is Armed Forces Day
- May 24th Legislative Luncheon at the Josh Gibson Center
- May 25th is Senior Walk @ Peachtree Mall
- May 29th is Memorial Day
2017 started with a bang for the River Valley Regional Commission. Each and every department has experienced changes and deadlines in the first three months of the calendar year. The Area Agency on Aging staff completed the Area Plan for our aging program. The key focus of the plan will be continuing to provide the existing services and providing assistive technology to clients as appropriate. Staff will also be working to develop a small pilot program to provide handicap ramps.

The Community and Economic Development staff along with the Planning staff submitted fourteen (14) Community Development Block Grant applications on April 3, 2017. Projects ranged from infrastructure improvements to housing rehabilitation and reconstruction.

The planning staff also completed the Stewart County and Cities of Lumpkin and Richland Comprehensive Plan. Plans are underway in Sumter County and its five municipalities, Dooly County and its six municipalities as well as one for Randolph County and the Cities of Cuthbert and Shellman. Staff also is working on Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plans for Macon County, Unified Government of Cusseta-Chattahoochee County, Unified Government of Georgetown-Quitman County, and Clay County.

Our Environmental Planner is busy working to install composting facilities within the Pataula Creek watershed. This will provide local hunters an alternative to illicit creek carcass dumping. Our Bike-Pedestrian staff submitted three (3) projects for a special funding cycle from the Georgia Department of Transportation. These projects were for improvements along state right-of-ways in the cities of Americus, Columbus and Reynolds.

And lastly, staff is beginning the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy process. A survey was sent out in January and is designed to help shape and define the RVRC’s five (5) year plan for regional economic development. The results of this survey will be used to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the region and will be part of the process to generate a new River Valley Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The new CEDS will take into account the results of this survey as well as the other regional planning documents and local economic development planning documents that have been recently created.

As always, the River Valley Regional Commission staff is here to serve you. Please let us know if there is anything that we can do to help your communities prosper!

Patti

New RVRC 2017 Council Officers

Clinton Perry, Jr., Chairman
Randy Howard, Vice Chairman
Jerry “Pops” Barnes, Secretary
The Georgia Cares Program is pleased to welcome Cheryl Maddox as the new Georgia Cares Coordinator for the River Valley Regional Commission (RVRC AAA). Cheryl is a native of Columbus, Georgia. After graduating high school, she joined the U.S. Army and retired after serving 21 years. In her last military assignment at Fort Stewart, Cheryl served as a Sexual Assault Victims’ Advocate and Equal Opportunity Advisor. She has a bachelor’s degree in Human Resource Management from Park University and is currently pursuing a Master’s degree in Human Services. She enjoys traveling and spending time with her 4-year old daughter, Caitlyn. Cheryl’s dedication and experience in serving her country and community will be a great addition to the Georgia Cares Program.

Planning Department

Welcome Laura Schneider to the Planning Department. She is the new Environmental Planning Assistant. Laura is assisting Lance Renfrow with the administration of the section 319(h) grant for the Pataula Creek Watershed by performing water quality monitoring and analysis, data entry, research, and more. Laura graduated from Columbus State University in 2015 with a degree in Environmental Science. During her time there, she held an internship with the Chattahoochee RiverWarden where she regularly monitored the health of local streams. After graduating, she continued this work as a volunteer, and later began working as their Outreach Coordinator. Laura remains in this position, balancing her roles at each organization. She grew up in Columbus and now resides in Pine Mountain with her fiancé, Justin, and their German Shepherd, Sadie. Laura enjoys spending time outdoors camping, hiking, and kayaking.

Finance Department

In January 2017, Emily Chambers, Finance Officer with River Valley Regional Commission, received notification from The Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada that she passed the Governmental Accounting, Auditing, and Financial Reporting examination in partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining the Certified Public Finance Officer designation. This was the first in a series of five exams that she must pass in order to become certified. Congratulations Emily, we are proud of you! One down and four to go... We are certain that you’ll do just fine.

Aging Department

The River Valley Regional Commission Area Agency on Aging is delighted to have Marie Peterson join the team as the new AAA Monitor. Marie earned her undergraduate degree in Business Management and Graduate degree in Human Resource Management from Troy State University. She brings skills, abilities and a wealth of knowledge to her current position, having previously worked for years with local agencies, families, children, and seniors throughout the community as well as in banking. In addition to walking and biking, Marie loves spending time with her family and significant other, attending her grandson’s baseball games, reading and traveling.

Staff Spotlight

Georgia Cares

Cheryl Maddox, Georgia Cares Coordinator

Finances Department

Emily Chambers, Finance Officer, River Valley Regional Commission

Aging Department

Marie Peterson, AAA Monitor

Staff Spotlight

Georgia Cares

Cheryl Maddox, Georgia Cares Coordinator

Finance Department

Emily Chambers, Finance Officer, River Valley Regional Commission

Aging Department

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Staff Spotlight

Georgia Cares

Cheryl Maddox, Georgia Cares Coordinator

Finance Department

Emily Chambers, Finance Officer, River Valley Regional Commission

Aging Department

Marie Peterson, AAA Monitor
The River Valley Regional Commission (RVRC) conducts a survey of economic development goals every five (5) years. This is done as a part of the development of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the 16 counties in west central Georgia that are served by the River Valley Regional Commission. The survey is designed to help shape and define the five (5) year plan for regional economic development.

The results of this survey will be used to determine the strengths and weaknesses in the region and will be part of the process to generate a new River Valley Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. The new CEDS will take into account the results of this survey as well as the other regional planning documents and local economic development activities that have been recently created or are underway. In particular, the Columbus 2025 plan that the Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce has developed as well as the efforts of One Sumter and Grow Randolph initiatives. All of these local economic development planning initiatives are important to the region and will be highlighted to identify and execute economic development goals.

Participation in the survey is needed in order to ensure that we have a balanced response from the entire region. Please take five minutes to take the online survey and make sure your input is included. The target audience for this survey is anyone in the region with an interest in economic development. A link to the online survey can be found at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2018CEDS. Links are also available on the River Valley Regional Commission website at http://rivervalleyrc.org.

The current CEDS is available for public review by visiting www.rivervalleyrc.org and clicking on the Economic Development page. The 2018-2023 plan will be available for review and comment when completed.

REVOLVING LOAN FUND
The RVRC has funds available to assist start-up and existing small business. For more information on how you can qualify, contact: Sarah Walls, swalls@rivervalleyrc.org or Jim Livingston, jlivingston@rivervalleyrc.org
Retirement Recognition of Mary A. Day

Mary A. Day, Assistant AAA Director of the River Valley Regional Commission Area Agency on Aging (RVRC AAA), took medical retirement on November 28, 2016 after 20 years of employment. Mary has more than 30 years of management experience in working with various Human Service Programs and Health Services agencies. She was hired as the AAA Monitor/Contract Manager with the program and was promoted to Assistant AAA Director in 1998. Mary’s responsibilities included assisting the AAA Director in carrying out roles and responsibilities within the AAA office and acting on her behalf during her absence. She assisted the AAA Director with planning, coordinating, administering, and evaluating activities involving the development and implementation of the Comprehensive Area Plan for older and disabled adults and their caregivers in the River Valley Regional Commission Area Agency on Aging Planning and Service area.

Mary stated that her job has been a rewarding experience, as it was a position that allowed her to meet directly with elderly clients and/or caregivers during her programmatic monitoring visits. For the last fourteen years, Mary coordinated with seniors and site managers to attend the annual Senior Week at the Capitol, sponsored by the Georgia Council on Aging/Co-Age.

Mary loves to read, travel, shop, spend time with her family and friends and attend football games. She is the proud mother of three sons, two daughters-in-law and eight grandchildren. She is involved in various civic and social organizations in the community, is a member of the Business and Professional Women’s Club, and the Carver High Alumni Association.

Mary is a true advocate for seniors, caregivers and the disabled population. She plans to use her medical retirement focusing on getting well.

State Funds Now Available for Scrap Tire Amnesty Events and to Remove Tires Dumped on City and County Right-of-Ways

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) announced the availability of funding from the State Solid Waste Trust Fund (SWTF) to remove and recycle scrap tires dumped along city and county right-of-ways and to pay for scrap tire amnesty events.

Local governments and solid waste authorities can apply for funding, in the form of a reimbursement, to cover the cost of transporting and processing these tires. With this announcement, EPD adds two new eligibility categories for state-funded cleanup under a program that began last summer.

In July 2015, EPD began accepting applications from local governments and solid waste authorities for funding to cover the cost of transporting and processing scrap tires from areas where the property owner is either unknown, financially unable to clean up the tires, or a victim of illegal dumping.

Applications for all three types of cleanups will be accepted on a rolling basis and awarded on a first come, first served basis, contingent on funding availability and demand.

Funding for the program comes from the state Solid Waste Trust Fund, which was established in 1990 as part of the Georgia Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Act. In 1992, an amendment to the Act established a primary source of funding for the SWTF in the form of a $1.00 fee on every new tire sold in the state. Each year, fees collected the previous year may be appropriated by the General Assembly to EPD.

For more information on this funding opportunity, including how to apply, please visit http://epd.georgia.gov/scrap-and-used-tires, or call Patti Cullen at (706) 256-2910 or email pcullen@rivervalley-rc.org.

Mary A. Day
On February 22nd, Bicycle and Pedestrian staff traveled to Furlow Charter School, in Americus, to hold a Bike Rodeo for their 3rd, 4th and 5th graders to teach proper bicycle safety and education. With the help of Chelsea Carter from Georgia Safe Routes to School and the cooperation of our newest school in its partnership, the students were taught how to ride safely throughout the community. Stations offered throughout the bike rodeo included a helmet fitting, the “ABC’s of Biking” to help student’s awareness of the functions of the bicycle, a helmet fitting and crash demonstration to teach students how to properly wear a helmet and how it can save one’s life, and an obstacle course. The obstacle course included a street-like comparison with stop signs, cars, and lanes in order to help teach children the proper way to bike on a street while using turn signals. The Furlow Charter School is the first program partner in Sumter County and Americus and becomes the 21st school in the River Valley region to participate in the program. If a school in your community is looking to become a Safe Routes to School partner contact Julio Portillo, Bicycle and Pedestrian Planner, at jportillo@rivervalleyrc.org or 706-256-2910 for more information.

In less than two years James Otis Cochran, of Americus, has been able to turn his two-year technical college education into the job of a lifetime. He just recently began a new position as a Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC) Documentation Graphics Illustrator at AECOM Government Services, Inc., in Albany.

With assistance from the WIOA program, Cochran graduated from the South Georgia Technical College (SGTC) drafting program in May, 2015. He was selected as the “Student of Excellence” for his program and competed to be recognized as the Student of Excellence for that division at the college.

“Technical education works,” said Deo Cochran, a Retention and Coaching Specialist at South Georgia Technical College, who is also James Cochran’s mother. “I believe in technical education and my children have definitely benefited from attending SGTC. This is a great place to start and learn the skills and knowledge needed to get a job.” James earned his drafting degree and was hired by Cable Connections Incorporated, LLC in Albany. He was successful with that company and his supervisor has requested that the college send them more employees like him. Even with that initial success, he was still excited to pursue a career in the graphic arts field. He had studied art at Georgia Southwestern State University in Americus prior to coming to SGTC and entering the drafting program.

His artistic talents combined with the practical and computer application skills that he learned in his drafting classes at SGTC helped him to attain the job of a lifetime at AECOM Government Services in Albany. AECOM is an architecture, engineering and construction, environmental graphics and interiors company with offices worldwide.

For information about enrolling at South Georgia Technical College, please call (229) 931-2394 or (229) 271-4040. You may also visit the website at www.southgatech.edu. Financial aid is available.
Preston Pipkin came into Paxen lacking a sense of direction regarding the path that he intended to take in life. With only a 9th grade education, Preston showed amazing drive and zeal to obtain an educational accomplishment that would pave the way for bigger and better opportunities in life. He took complete responsibility for his education and passed all parts of the GED exam the first time. Upon successful completion of the GED Prep course, Preston subsequently entered into Paxen’s Work Experience program. This opportunity gave him the chance to refine and gain important skill sets needed in the work environment.

**ON-THE-JOB TRAINING PROGRAM (OJT)** is a federally funded program that helps employers hire and train workers for full-time, long term employment. Through OJT programs, employers may be reimbursed up to 50-75 percent of the wages up to $3,000 earned by eligible new trainees while they learn the job. Experience and the new skill gave Preston the opportunity to dual enroll in Paxen’s newly attained On-The-Job Training Program.

### Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>County / City</th>
<th>Project</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City of Richland</td>
<td>Sewer System Improvements Phase 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>City of Talbott</td>
<td>Sewer System Improvements</td>
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<tr>
<td>City of Cordele</td>
<td>Street/Drainage Improvements</td>
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<tr>
<td>City of Ellaville</td>
<td>Water System Improvements</td>
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<tr>
<td>City of Reynolds</td>
<td>Water/Sewer System Improvements Phase 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>City of Montezuma</td>
<td>Water System Improvements</td>
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<tr>
<td>City of Buena Vista</td>
<td>Water/Sewer System Improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion County</td>
<td>Street/Drainage Improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Cuthbert</td>
<td>Sewer System Improvements Phase 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town of Pine Mountain</td>
<td>Street/Drainage Improvements</td>
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<tr>
<td>City of Plains</td>
<td>Water/Sewer System Improvements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Randolph County</td>
<td>Street/Drainage Improvements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stewart County</td>
<td>Housing Rehabilitation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chattahoochee County</td>
<td>Housing Rehabilitation</td>
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### City of Oglethorpe Cemetery Mapping

In November 2016, the City of Oglethorpe contracted with the RVRC to map the 20 acre city cemetery. The city provided all of the paper maps of the cemetery that were available. The RVRC staff compiled the maps and estimated that there are close to 4,000 grave sites. Currently, 90% of the headstones have been entered into a Geographic Positioning System (GPS). A picture of each headstone was collected and linked to the GPS. RVRC staff created a web application that displays each headstone and the corresponding picture. City personnel will be given editing privileges to the application and they will be entering the name, date of birth, date of death and the condition of the gravesite for each headstone. The web application will help the city and the citizens with cemetery plot sales, maintenance, and finding the grave location of family and friends.

### GeorgiaCares Upcoming Events

- **April 6** - “Being Mortal” Health Fair @ Pitts Church of God, Clay County
- **April 8** - 5th Annual Health Expo @ Grant Chapel, Muscogee County
- **April 15** - River Festival Quitman County
Delivering Our Region’s Progress

Georgia Trails Summit

The RVRC is happy to announce its partnership with the Georgia Trails Summit that is coming to Columbus on April 20-22. For the first year, the Trails Summit will be offering Certification Maintenance (CM) credits for the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP). Interactive workshops will be offered that include a rafting trip along the largest urban whitewater rafting course in the country, mountain bike riding through Flat Rock Park, biking along Columbus’ bike trail system and equestrian rides along F. D. Roosevelt State Park. For more information visit https://georgiatrailsummit.com/.