Columbus City Council member Jerry “Pops” Barnes was honored by the Georgia Council on Aging at a state Capitol luncheon as this year’s Distinguished Older Georgian. The GCOA selected Barnes, 76, for his advocacy on state and national issues relevant to older adults and his commitment to improving the lives of seniors, especially in the area of healthcare. Barnes said he is deeply appreciative of the award but, “the bottom line is to be in a position to do things for people,” and he thanked Co-Age for nominating him for the award. He was recognized on February 13th as part of the Georgia Council on Aging’s Senior Week activities.
In Memoriam

River Valley Regional Commission mourns the loss of our dear friend and colleague, Gail Renee Boston Simpson, who departed her earthly life on December 28, 2019. Gail was a true servant leader who was full of life and touched many lives throughout the Chattahoochee Valley. As a dedicated employee, she provided almost twenty-five years of loyal service to the Commission. She began her employment as the receptionist in 1993 and became the fiscal analyst for the Area Agency on Aging for the past twenty years. Gail was very active in the community as a member of Nazareth Missionary Baptist Church, the Columbus Chapter of Jack and Jill of America, Inc., New Ladies of Columbus Chapter-Order of the Eastern Star, Modern Free and Accepted Masonic Organization, Sisters in Synec, W.H. Spencer High School Alumni Association, and several other civic and community organizations. She truly loved serving others and regularly volunteered her time to do so. In addition to her regular job duties, she had recently completed training as a Certified Tai Chi instructor and taught several Tai Chi classes at the Senior Centers within the River Valley Region. The River Valley Regional Commission staff extends our deepest condolences to Gail’s family and will continue to cherish her memory forever in our hearts.

Smithsonian Exhibit Comes to Randolph County

Out of hundreds of applicants, Cuthbert (Randolph County) was chosen to host the Celebrate Rural America! Exhibition in 2020. Crossroads: Change in Rural America is a museum on main Street exhibition sponsored by the Smithsonian Institute, the Georgia EMC’s, and funded by the U.S. Congress. The exhibition showcases rural areas and people in photos, videos and artifacts from across the United States. Objects from Cuthbert and Randolph County history also supplemented the Smithsonian displays. Cuthbert is the fourth destination of the showcase and housed the exhibit from January 18, 2020 – February 29, 2020.

From The Desk of the Executive Director

We hope that your community has adapted to social distancing and been able to adjust to the new challenges of COVID-19. While the information and terrain changes daily, the RVRC is taking measures to adapt and remain flexible in order to continue to serve the Region.

Administration
We have allowed staff to work from home, while maintaining a skeletal crew in both the Americus and Columbus offices. We are not seeing visitors at either office as of now, but we are taking phone calls, and all staff can respond by email. Your normal methods of communication with us should not be interrupted.

Aging Department
All Senior Centers that we work with in the region are closed: The Aging and Disability Resource Connection lines are open and working with eligible participants to connect them to services. If you have seniors in your community who need services, please direct them there first. The ADRC Hot line is 706-256-2900 or 1-800-615-4379. Home Delivered Meals are continuing and becoming a more important component of our work. Again, please let us know if you have referrals for people in your community who would need these services.

Planning Department
The deadline for CDBG applications has been pushed back to May 1. The state and DCA have also pushed back the deadlines for several reports and audits local governments are responsible for. Look for information on that from DCA. If you have any questions, please let us know. For those communities writing CDBG applications this year, we are pressing ahead to try and complete them as quickly as possible. We are also continuing to work on our other planning projects like pre-disaster mitigation plans and comprehensive plans. The planners will continue to be in touch with you about these projects.

Transportation Department
Transit services continue to operate. Buses are being sanitized every day and serving clients throughout the region as of today. Some transit trips are assisting with home delivered meals to seniors who cannot attend the senior centers.

Workforce Innovation
WIOA services are still being offered, but with the changes in both employers’ and educators’ schedules, delivery of those services are challenged. WIOA Regional Plans are due later in 2020, and staff is actively working to develop those plans.

Finally, we are getting word on different federal programs that are becoming available to help with the financial challenges associated with the COVID-19 outbreak. Small Business Administration loans for businesses and other federal programs are being developed to help. We will continue to forward this information to you and post on social media.

If you have any issues that you think we would be able to help with, please ask. We are open, will continue to work, and want to help.

Jim Livingston
Executive Director
The River Valley Regional Commission partnered with Safe Kids Columbus, Sumter Cycling, and Reynolds Ramblers to host four bicycle helmet giveaways in the month of December. Over 400 children received helmets, and 14 bicycles were given away in Reynolds. Volunteers fitted each child for their helmet and provided them with safety information. The use of bicycle helmets can prevent anywhere between 85% and 88% of traumatic head and brain injuries. If every child between the ages of 4 and 15 wears a bicycle helmet, children can avoid between 39,000 to 45,000 head injuries annually.

Bike Helmet Giveaways

The River Valley Regional Commission, along with Safe Kids Columbus, Sumter Cycling, and Reynolds Ramblers, hosted four bicycle helmet giveaways across December. Over 400 children received helmets, with 14 bicycles being given away in Reynolds. Volunteers fitted each child with a helmet and provided them with safety information, emphasizing the importance of bicycle helmets in preventing head and brain injuries. With 85% to 88% of head injuries preventable by wearing a helmet, the giveaways aimed to protect children aged 4 to 15 from these injuries, potentially averting thousands of incidents annually.

CDBG Applications Underway

RVR staff is currently working with eleven (11) communities to pursue a 2020 CDBG application. These projects range from septic tank replacements in Cordele to housing rehabilitation in Talbot County. CDBG funding is critical in aiding local governments address infrastructure issues in the region. Water problems, sewer issues, and flooding are key issues that this source of funding can be used to help local and moderate-income persons in the community.

Applications this year have been a little different than years past. The Department of Community Affairs has put an emphasis on compliance, timeliness, and making sure all local governments who submit applications are fully compliant. Qualified Local Governments (QLGs) have been working on CDBG applications.

Reynolds Bicycle Helmet Giveaway – Michelle Gee fits local child with a helmet during the giveaway in Reynolds on December 15.

CDBG Investment in Andrew College

On January 25, 2020, Andrew College, located in Cuthbert, held a ribbon cutting ceremony for the grand re-opening of Warren Bush Hall, which had been closed for over 15 years. With a low-interest loan from USDA Rural Development, the building was completely renovated and now houses seven new classrooms, faculty offices, student study space, and the nursing program. Warren Bush is now set to be an important part of the educational life of Andrew College for another 100 years.

The City of Oglethorpe has recently created a Downtown Development Authority and hired Natalie Bradley as the first Executive Director. Mrs. Bradley approached RVRC staff about facilitating a strategic planning session for the new organization to identify priorities and potential activities. On January 21, 2020, Allison Slocum, Historic Preservation Planner, met with around 40 stakeholders in Oglethorpe. Allison led the group in an exercise to determine the boundaries of downtown Oglethorpe and identify their favorite parts and their not-so-favorite parts of downtown. The group spent the main portion of the evening discussing and listing the strengths and weaknesses of downtown Oglethorpe as well as the opportunities and threats approaching the community.

Bike Helmet Giveaways

On January 25, 2020, Andrew College held a ribbon cutting ceremony for the grand re-opening of Warren Bush Hall, which had been closed for over 15 years due to a USDA Rural Development Loan. With a low-interest loan from USDA Rural Development, the building was completely renovated and now houses seven new classrooms, faculty offices, student study space, and the nursing program. Warren Bush is now set to be an important part of the educational life of Andrew College for another 100 years.

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GIVEAWAYS/MEETINGS AND EVENTS

In the Region

- September 11 for a “Deep Dive” charrette – a series of meetings, field work, and collaborative design with the relevant stakeholders. The team worked with community partners and City officials to develop a bike-way implementation study that is equitable, technically sound, and driven by local needs. Look for updates in the coming months about making Americus more bicycle friendly! For more information, check out our website: https://activevalley.org/connectingamericus.

- Jimmy Carter National Historical Park

ATLANTA, GA – U.S. Senator David Perdue (R-GA), U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson (R-GA), Congressman Sanford Bishop (D-GA-02), and the entire Georgia congressional delegation introduced a bill re-designating the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site in Plains, Georgia, as the “Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.”

- ALTA Planning and Design Visit

Alta Planning & Design, Inc. (ALTA), was in Americus from December 9-11 for a “Deep Dive” charrette - a series of meetings, field work, and collaborative design with the relevant stakeholders. The team worked with community partners and City officials to develop a bike-way implementation study that is equitable, technically sound, and driven by local needs. Look for updates in the coming months about making Americus more bicycle friendly! For more information, check out our website: https://activevalley.org/connectingamericus.

- USDA Investment in Andrew College

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Below: Ribbon cutting ceremony for the grand re-opening of Warren Bush Hall, which has been re-opened after 15 years thanks to a USDA Rural Development Loan.
Mr. Barfield explained that he listed as a contact for Mr. Malone. After contacting Mr. Barfield who was the referral, the ADRC counselor living by himself. They found that Mr. Malone was not able to do so. The ADRC helped link Mr. Malone with Direct Services, a cleaning business. Mr. Malone has known Mr. Barfield since he was 33 years old when he began working in Mr. Barfield’s dry cleaning business. Mr. Malone says that they have been friends ever since. Mr. Barfield has helped Mr. Malone through the years with accessing needed resources but he says he is “getting too old.” He worried who would help Mr. Malone when he is unable to do so.

The ADRC helped link Mr. Malone with Direct Services, a sub-contractor of the River Valley Regional Commission Area Agency on Aging, and Mr. Barfield helped him budget his income in order to pay for home delivered meals temporarily. Mr. Malone was also screened and was determined to be eligible to go on the waiting list for Homemaker and Home Delivered meals. He has since started receiving both services. He was also linked with Natalie Prater, ADRC Resource Specialist with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), to be assessed for service through DBHDD.

Through the collaboration of Adult Protect Services, the ADRC and DBHDD, Mr. Malone has found safe and stable housing, regular nutritious meals, assistance with maintaining the cleanliness of his home, and hopeful on-going services to help him continue to live independently for as long as possible.

The Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) is a one-stop resource for anyone who has questions about services for persons 60+ and persons with disabilities. Recently one of our ADRC Counselors worked with Mr. Malone to identify resources to help him live independently. Mr. Malone (64 years old) was referred to the ADRC by Adult Protective Services. They were assisting him with relocating due to concerns about his living conditions, and they felt that he would need some extra assistance living by himself. After receiving the referral, the ADRC counselor contacted Mr. Barfield who was listed as a contact for Mr. Malone. Mr. Barfield explained that he has known Mr. Malone since he was 33 years old when he began working in Mr. Barfield’s dry cleaning business. Mr. Malone says that they have been friends ever since. Mr. Barfield has helped Mr. Malone through the years with accessing needed resources but he says he is “getting too old.” He worried who would help Mr. Malone when he is unable to do so.

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Qwentavian Tyson came to the WIOA funded program at Eckerd Connects to obtain his General Education Diploma. He spent many hours with Eckerd staff studying, practicing, and being a role model for his fellow GED classmates. In two short months, Qwentavian’s persistence paid off as he achieved his educational goal and achieved his GED. After obtaining his GED, Qwentavian was placed in the Work Experience services to get hands on work experience. Qwentavian was placed at the Americus Housing Authority working in the maintenance department where he gained some valuable workplace fundamentals and skills. He is currently enrolled at South Georgia Technical College studying Computer Science.