Cycling Through the River Valley

Cyclists from throughout the southeast came to the River Valley this fall to participate in cycling events and to learn how to make their hometowns more bicycle friendly.

The RVRC bicycle/pedestrian staff assisted with the Fair on the Square Bicycle Ride in Lumpkin and the Tour de Farm which included sites in Sumter, Schley and Crisp counties in the River Valley.

The RVRC partnered with Bicycle Columbus and Georgia Bikes to host the Georgia Bike Summit October 24-26 in Columbus.

More than 115 people attended the summit, which was themed “Complete Streets, Competitive Communities.” The keynote speaker was Roger Millar from Smart Growth America.

Columbus Mayor Teresa Tomlinson spoke during lunch on Saturday and representatives from Bicycle Columbus and Sumter Cycling presented programs during the summit.

The 3rd annual Tour de Farm (Nov. 7-9) featured farms in Sumter, Schley, and Lee counties. The event began at the Georgia Veterans State Park in Crisp County and the cyclists enjoyed a ride on the SAM Shortline Excursion train to the Jimmy Carter Boyhood Farm. After cycling to Americus, the riders were treated to a meal at the Americus Center for the Arts with live entertainment and art demonstrations. Forty-eight people participated.

The Fair on the Square Bicycle Ride was held October 18 in Lumpkin and included stops at historical sites, Florence Marina, and Providence Canyon. With 110 people participating, this was one of the largest attendances in the ride’s 13-year history.

SAVE THE DATE: Prison to Peanuts Bicycle Adventure April 25, 2015
Bike to Work events will be held in Americus and Columbus in May.
Community Garden in Macon County
The River Valley Area Agency on Aging received a $5,000 grant to plan and coordinate a community garden project for Macon County. The purpose of this project is to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables for better nutrition. The establishment of a garden will also enhance community interaction and connectivity from which members of the community can reap the fruits of their harvest—both figuratively and literally. The Macon County Community Garden Project is currently being implemented and the garden will be established in Oglethorpe behind the Riverview Senior Center.

River Valley represented at GARC Conference
The Georgia Association of Regional Commissions held its 2014 Annual Conference November 5-7 at the King and Prince on St. Simons Island.

The conference was well attended by the 12 Regional Commissions’ staff, council members, local elected officials and state officials. Council members representing the RVRC were Terrell Hudson of Dooly County, Clinton Perry of Taylor County, Harry Lange of Harris County, Richard Morris of Georgetown-Quitman County, Randy Howard of Sumter County, Mayor Rebecca Chambers and Public Works Director Ricky Hood of Hamilton. Many of the RVRC staff members also attended.

The speakers for the first day general session meeting included Ben Hames, deputy commissioner, Workforce Division of the Georgia Department of Economic and Community Development; Ross King, director of the Association of County Commissioners; Lamar Norton, director of the Georgia Municipal Association; and Jay Shaw and Todd Long, Georgia Department of Transportation.

Gretchen Corbin, former Georgia Department of Community Affairs commissioner, and Todd Rehm, editor of GaPundit.com, spoke at the closing general session.
Youth Work Experience: On the job at Souther Field Aviation

WIA Youth participants enrolled in the GED Plus training activity have the opportunity to participate in a Work Experience component. Dylan Williams is enrolled with the Paxen GED Plus WIA activity and recently obtained his General Education Diploma (GED). Dylan passed all four subject area parts on his first attempt (which is a big accomplishment) on the new GED 2014 examination.

Dylan chose to participate in the youth Work Experience activity and was placed on a worksite at Souther Field Aviation Inc. in Sumter County. This company manages the local Americus-Sumter County airport on behalf of the Americus-Sumter County Airport Authority.

Youth participants engaged in the Work Experience activity are eligible to work 32 hours per week for up to six weeks. The Paxen staff strives to place youth at work sites where they have an occupational interest to allow them to learn about the occupation with hands-on learning.

Dylan has enrolled and will begin classes in January 2015 at South Georgia Technical College and has selected Aviation Maintenance Technology as his program of study.

Businesses or employers interested in serving as a Work Experience worksite should contact Paxen Learning at (229) 931-8990.

Seniors complete Matter of Balance course

AAA Program Director Ilona Preattle (RN-BC) and Director Tiffany Ingram facilitated an 8-session Matter of Balance evidenced-based program in Randolph County. This program helps participants overcome their fear of falling. One out of three adults age 65 and over falls each year. Falls are the leading cause of injuries and death for older adults. In 2010, medical costs of falls totaled over $28.2 billion. Matter of Balance promotes and supports exercising and cognitive restructuring. Thirteen participants successfully completed the program.

Would you like to receive the RVRC newsletter via email?
Please send your contact information to manderson@rivervalleyrc.org
**SGTC Community Business Forum features Speaker of the House**

Speaker of the House David Ralston spoke at a Community Business Forum October 1 at South Georgia Technical College. “Economic development is my passion and growing jobs is how we need to create a better Georgia for all Georgians but particularly those in rural Georgia,” Ralston said. Pictured are (from left) RVRC Chairman Terrell Hudson, Speaker of the House Ralston, RVRC Assistant Executive Director Sarah Walls, and State Representative Mike Cheokas.

**Georgia Chamber President visits Randolph County**

More than 40 people from Randolph County and neighboring jurisdictions gathered at the Randolph County Government Center on October 9 to hear Chris Clark, president/CEO of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce speak.

Clark stated he grew up in South Georgia and knew the problems facing rural Georgia, such as access to health care, education, training a quality workforce, and transportation. He commended the region for working together to pass the Transportation Investment Act.

Clark said rural communities must have a multi-prong strategy in order to attract businesses and stated that leadership in the community matters. He said communities that are working together, from the business community to the elected officials, will have the advantage when a company looks to locate in their city or county.

**SCHS receives grant for jail preservation work**

The Stewart County Historical Commission has received a $10,000 award from the Georgia Heritage Grant Program. This grant award will fund stabilization and window repair for the historic Stewart County Jail.

The Georgia Heritage Grant Program is administered by the Historic Preservation Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and is intended to provide financial assistance for preservation activities in the categories of preservation predevelopment and “bricks and mortar” projects.
New AAA staff

The River Valley Area Agency on Aging welcomes two new staff members: Kimberly Bellamy (case manager) and Melissa Price (options counselor).

Kimberly has seven years of experience providing ongoing support to benefit the physical, mental, and psychosocial well-being of senior citizens. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in exercise science from Georgia State University and a Master of Science Administration degree in public administration from Central Michigan University. She is a native of Columbus; she enjoys singing, going to the movies, and spending time with her daughter, Ava Marie.

Melissa is a native of Buena Vista and graduated from Georgia Southwestern State University in 2008 with a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology. She earned a master’s in education in school counseling from Columbus State University. She and her husband Nick have a daughter named Layla.

GeorgiaCares program hosts “Be Senior Savvy” Expo

The River Valley GeorgiaCares Program concluded Medicare Open Enrollment 2014 with the “Be Senior Savvy and Health Expo” at the Columbus Public Library.

GeorgiaCares partnered with the Columbus Regional Mobile (Health) Unit and several vendors from the local community provided door prizes and products/services from their respective agencies. The Columbus Regional Mobile Unit administered blood pressure/insulin checks for each participant and provided information on how to stay healthy during the holiday season.

The Fort Valley State Mobile Technology Unit was also onsite to assist beneficiaries with any last-minute Medicare changes for plan year 2014. New Medicare coverage options began January 1, 2015.

AAA staff Lacey Pitts helps at the registration table.

AAA staff Franetta Miles, Linda Harris and Shameika Averett at the Be Senior Savvy and Benefits Check-up event.

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River Valley Centennial Farms

Three farms in the River Valley region were recognized in October as Centennial Family Farms: Southern Pecan Orchards (Macon County), Wilson Farm (Taylor County), and Brady-Dillard Farm (Marion County). The award honors farms that have been owned by members of the same family for at least 100 years.
Harris attends National Caregiver Summit
Linda Harris, West Central Georgia CARE-NET coordinator, represented the River Valley at the 2014 National Caregiver Summit held October 22-24 at the Rosalynn Carter Institute in Americus. Each year the summit provides workshops that are designed to educate and empower family caregivers. This year’s theme was “Supporting the Unsung Heroes behind our Heroes.” Guest speakers included Army Sgt. First Class Cory Remsburg, who was injured in October 2009 when his platoon hit a roadside bomb in Kandahar, Afghanistan. His parents, Craig and Annie Remsburg, shared their caregiving experiences during Cory’s road to recovery.

Celebrating Grandparents Day
Lacey Pitts (data resource specialist) and Shameika Averett (GeorgiaCares coordinator) attended Grandparents Day at River Road Elementary School. Lacey attended the school as a child and was happy to assist the grandparents with information about resources. More than 50 grandparents and other family members attended the event. Shameika informed the group about Medicare options and where to receive free, unbiased information relating to benefits.

Medicare Open Enrollment assistance
The GeorgiaCares Program continued its successful partnership with the Fort Valley State Mobile Technology Unit for Medicare Open Enrollment 2015. The unit is equipped with 10 computers with Internet access. The River Valley Area Agency on Aging GeorgiaCares Program and FVSU traveled to several counties including Clay, Talbot, Taylor, Stewart and Sumter senior centers. The seniors enjoyed playing Medicare BINGO while the staff assisted beneficiaries with their Medicare questions, plan comparisons, and applying for benefits.

AAA program director receives U.S. Citizenship
Ilona Preattle, the program director for the Area Agency on Aging, received her U.S. citizenship on August 20, 2014. Ilona was raised and educated in Germany where she studied nursing at the University of Frankfurt. She came to the United States in 1982 and obtained her nursing license in 1987.
She lives with her husband Barry in Auburn/Opelika and has a son Sebastian and daughter Renee. Four grandchildren keep them busy with a fifth arriving any day now.
“I am being asked why after so many years I decided to become a U.S. citizen,” said Ilona. “It was always on my mind. It was clear early on that I was truly a part of the community around me and that I was encouraged to pursue my dreams. For that I am very thankful. I wanted to show my support and loyalty to the country that has afforded me so much.”
Vienna designated as PlanFirst community

The City of Vienna (Dooly County) is one of the 10 Georgia communities to receive statewide distinction in a new program recognizing excellence in community planning. The “PlanFirst” designation acknowledges communities that have a proven track record of implementing their plan and a history of good plan development.

Other communities receiving the designation are: Athens-Clarke County, Coweta County, Johnson County, Jones County and the cities of Braselton, Gainesville, Madison, Suwanee, and Woodstock.

The PlanFirst program received 30 applications in its inaugural year. Eligible communities were required to address four primary program criteria focused on having a proven record of plan implementation success: goals, leadership, community participation, and implementation. The designation will last for three years, beginning January 1, 2015, and enables these communities to take advantage of various incentives that include public visibility, eligibility for funding, and certain reduced interest loans.

The next deadline for applications is May 15, 2015. More information about the program is available on the DCA website.

Randolph County Chamber receives Humanities Council grant

Randolph County Chamber of Commerce received a Georgia Humanities Council Grant to create three driving tour brochures that will include historic sites in Shellman and Cuthbert, as well as the unincorporated areas of Randolph County. Tourism is economic development and the Chamber actively seeks ways to bring tourists into the county, which boosts the tax base, promotes community pride, and in turn improves economic development.

“Providing these driving brochures will allow tourists, as well as local citizens, to experience the rich cultural heritage of Randolph County,” said Chamber President Patricia Goodman. “The Randolph County Chamber of Commerce would like to thank the Georgia General Assembly for appropriating these funds to the Georgia Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities, which made this grant possible.”

Caregiver of the Year

The West Central Georgia CARE-NET held its bi-monthly meeting on December 16 at the River Valley AAA office in Columbus. During this meeting Christine Bouyer was recognized as the 2014 West Central Georgia Volunteer Caregiver of the Year. Christine is a volunteer with Heart to Heart, the River Valley’s Telephone Reassurance Program. West Central GA CARE-NET Coordinator Linda Harris (left) is pictured presenting Christine with her award.

New TRIP$ system implemented

RVRC staff recently assisted in implementing TRIP$, a new online trip and billing system for the Department of Human Services.

DHS Transportation Services Section Manager Leigh Ann Trainer commended the efforts of Jarrod McCarthy and Grant Richardson. “The system roll out was a great success due to the diligence, professionalism, and expertise of the River Valley Regional Commission and more specifically, due to the dedication of Jarrod McCarthy and Grant Richardson,” Trainer stated in a letter to RVRC Executive Director Patti Cullen.

The RVRC staff monitored the users’ activities to ensure trips were correctly marked and followed up to guarantee all trips were fully reconciled. “Due to the tireless efforts of the River Valley Regional Commission, TRIP$ is implemented in Region 8 and working very well,” Trainer stated.
GIS Day

On November 19 four Geographic Information Systems (GIS) professionals from RVRC and the City of Americus visited Sumter County Elementary School. Students from 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades gathered in the lunch room in three sessions to celebrate National GIS Day.

A week prior to the event an interactive online GIS exercise was presented to the students in which they were asked to enter their E911 address, zoom in, and see their house and neighborhood on an aerial image.

Beverly Butcher and Sandra Neufeldt, from the Americus-Sumter County GIS office, presented data and maps for Americus and Sumter County.

Mariyana Kostov and Cassie Renfrow from RVRC did world geography trivia. A map gallery was set in the school front hallway.

Students had the chance to browse the maps and talk with the four GIS professionals.

Giveaways donated by ESRI, Middle Flint E911 Center, City of Americus, and the River Valley Regional Commission were presented to each of the 694 students.

WIA Workforce Center opens in Cordele

The Middle Flint WIA services has opened a Workforce Center in Cordele (Crisp County). The Center houses two WIA service providers’ operations: Heart of Georgia RESA, which provides On-The-Job Training services, and Paxen Learning, which provides the GED Plus services.

The Middle Flint Workforce Center is located at 606 15th Avenue in Cordele. Anyone interested in the WIA On-The-Job Training or GED Plus services should contact or visit the Workforce Center.