MLK Jr. Dedication in Sumter County

The Sumter County Board of Commissioners and the Georgia Historical Society dedicated a marker on April 11 at the Sumter County Courthouse commemorating Sumter County’s role in the civil rights movement. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested for protesting racial segregation in Albany on December 16, 1961 and held in the Sumter County Jail. His arrest dovetailed with community and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) efforts to establish the Sumter County Movement. In 1963, a group of adolescent girls were incarcerated in a Civil War-era stockade after their arrest for protesting. Americus garnered further attention when four activists were arrested for insurrection under Georgia’s 1871 seditious conspiracy law, a capital crime. A federal court ruled the law unconstitutional, establishing that peaceful protests...

Continued on Page 3

Senator Emmanuel Jones (center) recognized the RVRC during the MLK Jr. Ceremony at the capitol in January. Pictured are Assistant Executive Director Sarah Walls and Executive Director Patti Cullen.
From the Executive Director’s Desk...

As a regional planning agency we work with a range of needs, wants and opportunities in our counties and cities. Our agency and its member governments represent a wide spectrum of resources, and provide us with the opportunity to be involved in an incredible array of activities.

Because of the number of diverse activities that we are involved in all across the region and state we seek partnerships in order to advance our mission and build communities of lasting value. The RVRC must collaborate constantly in order to ensure that we are effectively meeting the needs of our counties and cities. We work with a variety of organizations such as DCA, EPD, GDOT, Family Connections, local chambers of commerce, technical colleges, universities and local businesses just to name a few.

These partnerships or relationships spark new ideas and solutions for issues facing our member governments. We hope to continue to build and strengthen these partnerships for the benefit of the region. Please let us know how we can partner with you!

Patti

Becky Holmes is the office manager for the Columbus office. She has been with the RVRC since 1995. She provides administrative and secretarial support to the commission’s staff among other varied administrative and secretarial duties.

Becky graduated from Phillips Jr. College and prior to joining RVRC she worked for the Muscogee County School District as secretary to the director of the Word Processing Department.

Becky is a native of Columbus. She and her husband Larry have one daughter. In her spare time she enjoys photography, sewing and gardening.

Community Developer Buddy Strength to retire June 30

Community Developer Buddy Strength will retire on June 30, 2015, after eight years with the RVRC. Buddy came to the RVRC (then Middle Flint) in 2007 while working through a program with the Department of Labor. He initially worked in the reception area and then the WIA department before the former director tapped him to help write grants. Buddy has since written and administered numerous CDBG, USDA, Economic Development, and IT&D grants.

“Buddy has been an outstanding staff member; he always put the needs of our communities first. He will not only be missed by his colleagues but by the local elected officials and the staff in our communities,” said RVRC Executive Director Patti Cullen.

Buddy was born in Americus and grew up in Decatur. He attended two years of school at Young Harris College before transferring to the University of Georgia where he earned his veterinary degree. He worked as a veterinarian for 20 years and was co-owner of the Peachtree Animal Hospital on Peachtree Road in Atlanta.

Buddy retired from his veterinary practice in 1990 and moved to Destin, Florida. “I lived there through many hurricanes and after Opal decided I was ready to leave,” he said. He moved to Phenix City where his sister and other relatives live and was caretaker for his mother.

After his mother passed away, Buddy said he got bored and started looking for something else to do. That’s when he came to RVRC, which he says was a complete change for him. “I had no idea what I was doing, but I knew I didn’t get calls in the middle of the night and had weekends off.”

“Eight years ago he may have been a novice, but now Buddy is one of the people we often turn to when we have questions,” said Katie Howard, director of economic and community development.

Buddy has enjoyed meeting people throughout the region and learning about local politics. “I like helping the people and seeing the improvements being made in the area,” he said. “I’ve been lucky; I’ve had two jobs I really enjoyed.”

He plans to spend his retirement taking care of his dogs and cats, which he describes as a full-time job, and pursuing his photography hobby.
MLK JR.  
continued from Page 1

could not be punishable by death. The movement’s success helped end segregation in southwest Georgia.

The River Valley Regional Commission was recognized in January during the state’s MLK Jr. ceremony at the capitol for assisting in the formation of the River Valley Martin Luther King Jr. Advisory Council. The council has been working on two projects: the historical marker recognizing Dr. King’s incarceration in the Sumter County Jail and video/audio recordings of people who experienced the Civil Rights Movement. These recordings will be available to local and state archives, libraries, etc.

Senator Emmanuel Jones, chairman of the state advisory committee, presented a proclamation to the River Valley Martin Luther King Jr. Advisory Council for its outstanding community service that honors Dr. King’s non-violent principles.

Show Your Love for the River Valley Photo Contest

In February the RVRC sponsored a “Show Your Love for the River Valley” photo contest. Entries were submitted for the following categories: Historic Sites, Our Town, Scenery, and Life in the River Valley. Judges chose a first place winner from each category and a grand prize winner was selected from the first place entries. The photos were posted on the RVRC Facebook page and the photo with the most likes received the People’s Choice award. This photo of the Andrew College president’s home received the Grand Prize award and first place in the Historic Sites category. See the other winning entries throughout the newsletter. All entries are posted on the RVRC Facebook page. We will sponsor another photo contest “Christmas in the River Valley” later this fall. Details will be posted on the RVRC website and Facebook page.

This photo of Chelsea’s Fountain in Shellman received the most likes on Facebook and received the People’s Choice award as well as first place in the Our Town category. The fountain was erected in memory of Shellman Mayor Paul Langford’s daughter.

Patricia Goodman was the photographer of the Grand Prize and People’s Choice photos.
WIA Youth Work Experience

Lacie Rogers (Crisp County) recently completed the WIA funded GED Plus training and passed all four parts of the GED examination on her first attempt. This is a big accomplishment due to the increased difficulty of the new GED exam. She is a great example for her peers and showed them how barriers do not always deter you from accomplishing your goals.

WIA Youth participants are eligible to participate in the Work Experience activity which is designed to teach participants solid work habits and skills. Work Experience participants are eligible to work for 32 hours per week for six weeks at a participating worksite. The WIA service provider strives to place youth at worksites where they have an occupational interest to allow them hands-on learning opportunities.

Lacie was placed at the Southwest Georgia United Empowerment Zone for her Work Experience activity. She began a permanent job search while participating in the Work Experience to increase her chances of finding employment. She has had several job interviews with area companies.

AAA staff complete Options Counseling Certification

Kia Barrow and Bill Weathers successfully completed an extensive training curriculum and have earned the Georgia Division of Aging Services Options Counseling certification. This certification requires completion of eight online courses from Boston University and a passing grade after each class as well as a comprehensive written exam and oral exam administered by the Division of Aging Services. Congratulations to Bill and Kia and their investment in providing statewide options counseling in keeping individuals in their homes and communities.

River Valley represented on ACCG Board of Managers

The Association County Commissioners of Georgia held its annual conference April 17-20 at the Savannah International Trade and Convention Center. The following RVRC Council members were appointed to serve on the ACCG Board of Managers: Harry Lange (Harris County), 3rd vice president; Randy Howard (Sumter County), District 8 representative; Terrell Hudson (Dooly County), at-large representative; and Clinton Perry (Taylor County), active past president. Bruce Huff (Columbus-Muscogee County) will continue to serve as the consolidated government representative.
2015 CDBG applications

- Bluffton – Water system improvements, $278,750
- Butler – Sewer rehabilitation, $500,000
- Cordele – Sewer rehabilitation, $500,000
- Ellaville – Water system improvements, $372,865
- Fort Gaines – Sewer system improvements, $500,000
- Georgetown/Quitman County – Street and drainage, $328,407
- Lumpkin – Water, sewer, street drainage improvements, $500,000
- Montezuma – Water system improvements, $500,000
- Plains – Water system improvements, $481,550
- Randolph County – Cooperative Extension building expansion, $500,000
- Reynolds – Water and sewer rehabilitation, $500,000
- Stewart County – Neighborhood Revitalization, $500,000
- Talbotton – Sewer system improvements, $487,505
- Taylor County – Water system, $500,000
- Vienna – Sewer system improvements, $500,000
- Webster County – Water system improvements, $500,000

Caregivers complete Powerful Tools training

River Valley Area Agency on Aging held a Powerful Tools for Caregiving training January 26, 2015 - March 9, 2015. This six-week evidenced-based education program equips caregivers with the tools and strategies they need to better handle the unique challenges that caregivers face.

West Central Georgia CareNet meeting

The West Central Georgia CARE-NET held its bi-monthly meeting on February 24, 2015, at the River Valley Area Agency on Aging office in Columbus. Muscogee County Probate Court Judge Rebecca Crowley spoke about how the courts can assist people with guardianships, conservatorships, options for the mentally ill and those with dual diagnoses. Attending the meeting were (seated, from left) Rhonda Hollis, Cheri Nolan, and Lyshuarn Davis; (standing) CARE-NET Coordinator Linda Harris, Probate Judge Rebecca Crowley, Brenda DeRamus, Lacy Pitts, Kia Barrow, Dianne Webb, and Janet Bussey.
This photo taken on Pataula Creek on Deer Creek Farm won first place in the Scenery category of the Show Your Love of the River Valley photo contest. Photographer was Gerry Goodman.

Student of Excellence

Anthony Jones, a WIA participant enrolled in the Welding and Joining program at South Georgia Technical College was named SGTC Student of Excellence. Each month, instructors nominate students from certain divisions for the Student of Excellence award. The winner is selected based on grades, work ethic, participation in clubs and organizations, and amount of program completion.

SGTC welding instructor Ted Eschmann nominated Jones for this honor stating, “Anthony is a natural at welding. He’s got a great work ethic and is a very motivated student.” Jones was also a nominee for the Georgia Occupational Award of Leadership this year and is a member of the National Technical Honor Society.

Jones received a plaque of recognition and a financial award from SGTC for his accomplishment. He thanked the SGTC instructors for believing in him and pushing him to do his best.

The SGTC WIA staff stated, “Anthony is an enthusiastic student who is focused and goal oriented. He is determined to be the best that he can be.”

AAA offers Tai Chi for Health classes

The River Valley Area Agency on Aging wrapped up two eight-week Tai Chi for Health classes in March.

The class offered at the Harris County Senior Center had seven participants who paid $5 per person making it the first Fee for Service program offered by the AAA. The class at the Ralston in Columbus had a total of 16 participants throughout the course of the class. These pilot classes helped create interest in the program and will serve as a model for future classes.

All the participants in this first round of classes successfully made it through the first six forms, and the class at the Ralston was able to move into more advanced forms due to some of the participants having previous experience in Tai Chi.

AAA staff members Charlotte Davis, Eboni Holder, and Lacey Pitts were trained as Tai Chi for Health instructors in August 2014 through a grant opportunity provided by the Evidence-Based Aging Services at the Division of Aging Services.

The next classes are in the planning phase and the instructors are exploring more venue options and fee structures to help keep the program sustained and growing. Updates will be posted on the River Valley Regional Commission website and on the RVRC Facebook page.
News from our River Valley Communities

**Americus**

Innovative Senior Solutions received an honorable mention in the Georgia Economic Developers Association’s annual Small Business Rock Star competition.

**Columbus**

The Development Authority of Columbus received $500,000 in EDGE funds to assist in the location of a medical administration facility for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Georgia. This will spur $58 million in private investment, an additional $4 million in public (non-DCA) investment, and create 250 jobs.

**MidTown, Inc.** received a $200,000 Knight Cities Challenge grant for its Minimum Grid-Maximum Impact proposal. The grant will help design pedestrian, bicycle and transit connections - a minimum grid - that connects the people and places of MidTown and Uptown. The Knight Foundation accepted applications from Knight cities across the country and awarded 32 grants.

RVRC staff assisted with this application and will partner with MidTown to implement the project.

**Marshallville**

The City of Marshallville was awarded a $16,500 USDA Search Grant to conduct a study of the water and sewer infrastructure to determine future infrastructure projects. RVRC staff assisted with this grant application.

**Richland**

The City of Richland received $50,000 in Immediate Threat and Danger (ITD) funds to assist in repairing the city's water pollution control facility, which will benefit 1,798 people. RVRC staff assisted with this grant application.

**Pine Mountain**

Pine Mountain is one of the five communities selected to receive assistance with housing needs through the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH). The other communities participating are Cedartown, Madison, Trion, and Liberty County. The three-year program began in February. Through training and technical instruction during a series of retreats, community housing teams design and implement strategies to enhance their economies as well as the quality of life for their citizens.

**Sumter and Taylor Counties**

The Sumter and Taylor County School Systems were selected to participate in the REACH Georgia program for the 2015-2016 school year. Sarah Neely and Joyce Hawkins from the REACH Georgia program spoke at the March RVRC Council meeting.

**Vienna**

Keep Vienna Beautiful received the Governor’s Circle Award March 18 during the Keep Georgia Beautiful Foundation’s Annual Legislative Day. The award recognizes exemplary performance in reducing litter, minimizing waste and greening local communities.

**Historical Marker Dedications**

The Georgia Historical Society recently dedicated three historical markers in the River Valley region that are included on the Civil Rights Trail. Markers were dedicated for:

- the Vienna Equalization School,
- activist Primus King (located at the Government Center, Columbus), and
- Sumter County’s role in the civil rights movement (located at the Sumter County Courthouse).
Delivering Our Region’s Progress

Bike to Work Week in Columbus
May 11-15, 2015

Bike to Work Day
Americus and Columbus
May 15, 2015

Check www.activevalley.org for details

Life in the River Valley
This photo won first place in the Life in the River Valley category in the RVRC’s Show Your Love for the River Valley photo contest held in February. The photo was taken by Cindy Goodwin Spencer of Weston and shows a boy spending time with his great-grandfather on the Goodwin Brothers Farm in Webster County. In 2013 the Goodwin Brothers Farm was recognized as one of Georgia’s Centennial Family Farms, meaning it has been in the same family for at least 100 years.