COLUMBUS RECEIVES NATIONAL BICYCLE FRIENDLY COMMUNITY DESIGNATION

Mayor Teresa Tomlinson announced on June 10 that the League of American Bicyclists (LAB) has named Columbus a Bicycle Friendly Community.

The LAB recognizes those communities that are improving health, safety, and quality of life in cities and towns nationwide. The RVRC assisted the City of Columbus and Bicycle Columbus in preparing the application.

RVRC worked with local cyclists to create the local bicycle advocacy group, Bicycle Columbus, five years ago. “The partnership with RVRC, the city, and Bicycle Columbus has helped put Columbus on the map as a Bicycle Friendly Community,” said RVRC Bicycle-Pedestrian Planner Julio Portillo. “Bicycle Columbus has received numerous grants from Georgia Bikes, hosted the annual Georgia Bike Summit, and continues to develop programs focused on bicycle safety education.”

Columbus received a bronze level designation and was among the 42 new and renewing cities recognized this year. With the new additions, there are now 350 Bicycle Friendly Communities that are home to 69 million people.

“We applaud this new round of communities for investing in a more sustainable future for the country and a healthier future for their residents and beyond,” said Andy Clark, president of the League of American Bicyclists. “The growing number of leaders taking up bicycling as a way of solving many complex community problems is encouraging. We look forward to continuing to work with these communities as we move closer to our mission of creating a bicycle-friendly America for everyone.”

Members of the Bicycle Columbus board of directors joined Columbus Mayor Teresa Tomlinson and RVRC Regional Bicycle-Pedestrian Planner Julio Portillo in announcing the city’s designation as a Bicycle Friendly Community. Pictured are (front, from left) Pat McHenry, Ann Miller, Robert Greene (Columbus Police Department), (back row) Annette Santianggo, Rob Kindrick, Tripp Layfield, Mayor Tomlinson, Julio Portillo, Gabe Denes, Jason McKenzie, Barry Carswell, and Logan Kipp, transportation planner for the City of Columbus.

See more River Valley cycling news on Page 7.
Several of my friends recently mentioned to me that they were going to do a staycation this summer. I was not familiar with this term but after they explained it to me I got to thinking about what a wonderful region we live in to take a staycation. A staycation is maybe spending the night at a local hotel, inn or even your own home and taking trips from there.

A recent study completed by the Georgia Department of Economic Development on the impact of tourism on the state for calendar year 2013 shows that approximately 6,000 jobs were created and/or supported by the tourism industry in our 16-county region; that tourism generated $592.22 million in direct spending, creating $22.37 million in state sales tax revenues and $16.94 million in local tax revenues. Each household in the region received basically $2,311.67 in tax relief as a result of the taxes generated by tourism economic activity in the region.

So with this in mind, take a staycation in the region! Go spend a day at Callaway Gardens in Harris County, or if fishing is more your thing, drive over to Talbot County to Lazar Wildlife Management Area where the fish are always biting. You may want to drive down U.S. Highway 27 and stop at the Infantry Museum or go whitewater rafting in Columbus. Continue on 27 and visit Riverbend Park, a great place to launch a boat or canoe and watch the wildlife from the water at Lake Walter F. George in Chattahoochee County.

You may want to spend the night at the cabins at Florence Marina in Stewart County and visit Westville or take a tour of Richland Rum and taste rum made from Georgia sugar cane or visit Quitman County and tour the Harrison-Guerry-Brannon-Crawford Family cemetery where many distinguished Georgians are buried.

Keep traveling on Highway 27 and stop in Cuthbert, county seat for Randolph County, and view the historic homes located throughout the community. In Clay County you may want to overnight again at George T. Bagby State park and enjoy a round of golf at Meadow Links. In Sumter County, you may want to stay in the beautiful downtown Windsor Hotel and use this as your location to visit downtown Plains and the Jimmy Carter National Historic site or the Andersonville National Historic site. You may want to head to Mom’s Kitchen in Webster County for a good old fashioned country lunch.

Up the road in Marion County you can take a peek at St. EOM (Pasaquan), one of the most important folk art centers in America, or stop in Taylor County and catch a race at the Silver Dollar Raceway. In Schley County, you may want to shop in the quaint downtown of Ellaville and view the murals about the town’s history.

Over in Macon County you may just want to stop and marvel at the diverse agricultural environment. Did you know that Macon County produces more milk than any other county in Georgia and is the number one grower of peaches? From Macon County head over to Dooly County and visit Vienna’s picturesque downtown or visit the Georgia State Cotton Museum. Plan another day and night to spend on Lake Blackshear in Crisp County, boating around or just enjoying some tasty watermelon.

These are just a few of the sites in the River Valley region, but it sure seems like a staycation could provide ample opportunity for recreation and relaxation!!!

Enjoy your summer.

Patti

Terrell Hudson recognized

At the June 2015 RVRC Council meeting Executive Director Patti Cullen recognized outgoing Chair Terrell Hudson for serving as chairman from January 2011 to June 2015.
RVRC staff recognized

RVRC staff recognized during the annual Legislative Luncheon in May were (from left) Buddy Strength, who retired June 30 with eight years of service; Allison Slocum, senior planner/historic preservation planner, 15 years; Gail Simpson, fiscal assistant, 20 years; Becky Holmes, office manager, 20 years; and Debbie Zwaga, receptionist/secretary, five years.

Middle Flint Regional 911 Center sets model for the state

The Middle Flint Regional E-911 Center in Ellaville celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. When the center began operating in March 2005 it was the first regional center in the state and remains the largest regional 911 center, geographically and in the number of agencies served.

The regional center originally included the seven counties of Dooly, Macon, Marion, Schley, Sumter, Taylor and Webster; Talbot joined in 2012. The region encompasses 2,800 square miles with a population of approximately 93,000.

“Prior to the creation of the regional 911 authority, no single county in the area could afford its own center,” said Executive Director Clayton Freeman, who has been with the center since 2009. “This regional concept has worked well for 10 years.”

The staff answers calls for 41 fire departments, 22 law enforcement agencies, and eight EMS agencies. Freeman said they receive an average of 255 calls a day, totaling approximately 93,000 calls a year. That number includes duplicate calls for some instances; he estimates there are 65,000 dispatched incidents each year.

The center employs 24 dispatchers and five administrative staff people. Six dispatchers are on duty 24 hours a day.

Funding for the center comes from telephone surcharge fees and contributions from each county. All telephone companies charge $1.50 per month for each phone line (wired or wireless) to fund the 911 center. The phone companies make up about 85 percent of the center’s budget with the remaining coming from the counties. The counties contribute a pro-rata share based on the amount of phone traffic handled by the center. Sumter County, the largest county in the region, makes up about 36%-37% while Webster, the smallest county, makes up about 3%.

Freeman said the center’s budget has taken a hit in recent years due to the decline in the number of landlines. In 2011 about 65 percent of the calls were from cell phones; now it’s 75 percent. Each landline disconnected accounts for $18 a year. That may not sound like much, but multiply that by 1,000 disconnected lines and that’s $18,000.

In February of this year the center installed a new answering system after making all the updates they could to the old system over the years. “This has all the bells and whistles that will allow us to go forward,” Freeman said.

The center is managed by the Middle Flint Regional E-911 Authority, which includes a representative appointed by each County Commission in the region. The board meets the fourth Tuesday of each month at 4 p.m. at the 911 Center.
Richland Mayor McLendon honored for 33 years of public service

On May 18, 2015, Richland Mayor Adolph McLendon was recognized by both the Georgia General Assembly and the United States Congress. The Honorable Gerald Greene read a Proclamation of Service passed by the Georgia General Assembly outlining the mayor’s long career of community service including 33 years as the mayor of Richland and serving on numerous local and regional boards. He has created a business-friendly setting, effectively generating sales tax revenue and has championed the preservation of Richland’s historic downtown storefronts through smart redevelopment.

Kenneth Cutts, district manager for Congressman Sanford Bishop, presented a Proclamation of Service passed by the United States Congress that commended Mayor McLendon’s many years of public service.

A celebration honoring Mayor McLendon was held by his staff, friends, supporters, and the citizens of Richland at the Richland Hotel.

WIA training leads displaced worker to new career

Alethea Holmes from Montezuma (Macon County) was dislocated from her employment at Southern Frozen Foods in 2001. Alethea took advantage of the educational and training opportunities available under the Middle Flint WIA program to change her career path.

Alethea enrolled in the WIA program and began her education in the Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program of study at South Georgia Technical College (SGTC). Alethea completed the LPN program and passed her Nursing State Board examinations in 2002. She immediately began her employment in 2002 at Tyson Foods at the Buena Vista site as the facility nurse.

Tyson Foods closed the Buena Vista site on May 29, 2015. WIA staff recently held Employee Information Sessions (EIS) for the employees of the Tyson Foods Buena Vista plant. It was at the EIS meetings, that Alethea shared with the WIA staff that she had been a previous WIA participant in 2001-2002.

She told how the WIA program helped her to continue her education and training to prepare for a nursing career. Alethea was very appreciative of the WIA services and told her fellow co-workers how WIA helped her when she too experienced being laid off from employment.

Alethea Holmes is a wonderful example of how the WIA services can help individuals advance or change career pathways. Alethea will once again be laid off from her employment with Tyson Foods, but thanks to WIA, she has the ability to have sustainable employment as a nurse with another employer.

It was a delight meeting Alethea Holmes and hearing her WIA success story.
Community Partners collaboration leads to GED success story

Toward the end of high school and into his early 20s, Ben Goodin had a drug use problem that led to crimes and a downward spiral of being in and out of jail. In May 2014, he was introduced to Leeann Crosson and began to get his life back on track.

Mrs. Crosson is a problem solving court coordinator with the Southwestern Judicial Circuit who helps individuals become productive citizens and pay their child support. Not long after meeting Ben, Mrs. Crosson referred him to Paxen Learning Center in hopes that he would earn his GED and gain meaningful employment.

Ben started the program in November 2014; he was present and punctual during the scheduled class times. He knew that this would be a difficult challenge given that he had been out of school for 16 years. He was very persistent in his pursuit of his GED by coming in to study almost every business day for six months and studying multiple hours a day. Ben achieved his GED in April 2015 and received his first job offer a week later. He is now working at a local business, earning a living and being a productive citizen of the community.

Groundbreaking for South Lumpkin Road Linear Park

A groundbreaking ceremony was held June 5, 2015, for the South Lumpkin Road Linear Park. This is a Rails-to-Trails project which will repurpose an abandoned railroad and create a multi-use path. The trail will link seven schools, a park, restaurants, residential areas, and various community organizations in South Columbus.

The long-term plan for the trail includes linking it with the city’s Riverwalk, Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center, the National Infantry Museum and Columbus’ overall bicycle and pedestrian trail network. Funding for the project came from dedicated congressional funding from Sanford Bishop and the 2010 Transportation Investment Act.
Older Americans Month

The Aging and Disability Resource Connection celebrated Older Americans Month in May with its annual Wellness Walk on May 1 at Peachtree Mall in Columbus. “Get into the Act” was the theme this year and focused on how older adults are taking charge of their health, getting engaged in their communities, and making a positive impact in the lives of others. This year also marked the 50th anniversary of the Older Americans Act.

Elder Abuse Awareness Month

The River Valley AAA observed Elder Abuse Awareness Month in June with programs to focus attention on the physical, emotional, and financial abuse of elders. Pictured is the River Valley Elder Rights Team (front, from left) Shameika Averett, Georgia Cares Program; Linda Harris, volunteer coordinator; (back row) Chandra Wilson, Georgia Legal Services; Diane King, Adult Protective Services.

The Culinary Center opens in Columbus

Direct Services and Columbus Technical College celebrated the opening of The Culinary Center in Columbus on May 28. The Culinary Center will house the food preparation operations of Direct Services Meal Programs and Columbus Technical College’s Culinary Arts Program. Direct Services is a provider for the River Valley Area Agency on Aging and provides more than 300,000 meals on an annual basis within the River Valley AAA service area.

Prison to Peanuts Bicycle Adventure

The annual Prison to Peanuts Bicycle Adventure was held April 25. Despite getting off to a rainy start that morning, 74 riders participated. This year’s ride was held in conjunction with the annual Arts in the Park in Americus and gave the riders an opportunity to see local artists at work.
Americus Mayor Barry Blount (front left) leads the Ride with the Mayor on Bike to Work Day, May 15. Riding with the mayor are RVRC’s Transportation Planner Julio Portillo and Community Developer Grant Richardson.

Sumter Cycling and RVRC provided an energizing station on South Lee Street in Americus on Bike to Work Day, May 15. RVRC’s GIS Manager Mariyana Kostov (second from right) rode her bike to work.

RVRC and Bicycle Columbus observed Bike to Work Week May 11-15 with the annual Ride with the Mayor on Tuesday, the Ride of Silence on Wednesday, and Bike to Work Day on Friday.

Columbus City Manager Isaiah Hugley rides a bike during the press conference announcing the Civic Center as a Bicycle Friendly Business.

**Civic Center named Bicycle Friendly Business**

In April the Columbus Civic Center was awarded a silver level designation as a Bicycle Friendly Business. The Civic Center joins Columbus Regional Hospital as the two businesses in Columbus to receive this national recognition.

As a bike-friendly business, the Civic Center offers:
- covered bike parking near guest services,
- certified staff trained to assist with minor bike repairs,
- free popcorn at arena events for guests riding their bikes,
- shower facilities at Columbus Ice Rink,
- courtesy bike patrol during events.

RVRC prepared the Bicycle Friendly Business application for the Civic Center.
August 28-30 | 2015

Register online at www.findyourparkride.org

FIND YOUR PARK
Centennial Bicycle Ride

Ride Options:

**Cyclists**
$75 - Camping, meals, train ticket, T-shirt
$60 - Meals, train ticket, T-shirt
(lodging on your own)

**Friend of Cyclists (not cycling)**
$50 - Camping, meals, train ticket, T-shirt
$30 - Meals, train ticket
(lodging on your own)

Support and Gear Vehicle
Rest Stops with Drinks and Snacks
Access to National and State Parks