GIS Day

GIS Manager Mariyana Kostov joined GIS professionals Beverly Butcher and Sandra Neufeldt with the City of Americus and Sumter County to host GIS Day on November 21 at Furlow Charter School in Americus.

Two fourth-grade classes and two fifth-grade classes participated in a “My Neighborhood Map” activity. The assignment was given to the students ten days prior to the GIS event and they were asked to map a block from their neighborhood adding important map elements such as street names, legend, north arrow, and scale bar. Maps were judged and two winners from each class were presented with prizes.

Beverly Butcher presented a lesson on how the Sumter County boundary has changed since the creation of the county.

During the question-and-answer session, the curious 10- and 11-year-old future mappers asked questions such as what is the largest county in Georgia, do you make weather maps, and how the city/county boundaries are established. GIS Day giveaways, provided by ESRI, were given to each student.
From the Executive Director’s Desk…

The close of 2015 brought many changes to the River Valley Regional Commission. We officially moved into our new office building on December 14 and closed on the sale of the 2nd Avenue property on December 22. Our new location in Columbus, 710 Front Avenue Suite A, provides us with a more efficient, modernized space with room to grow.

The staff and I want to thank each of the members of our Council for voting to purchase and renovate our new facility. The confidence that each Councilmember has in the River Valley Commission is greatly appreciated.

If you are ever in Columbus please feel free to drop by our new offices for a visit and look at the investment you have made in this community and the region. We will continue to maintain our Americus office as well in order to provide each community with outstanding services.

As we begin 2016, please know that the staff of the River Valley Regional Commission is here to serve you. The strength of our agency is being able to work with all of you to implement the visions you have for your communities. We look forward to serving each of you in 2016!

Patti

Staff Spotlight

RVRC welcomes Joel Hanif as an assistant planner and community developer in the Americus office and LaCarole Lloyd as an options counselor for the Area Agency on Aging.

Joel, a Columbus native, earned a Bachelor of Arts in geography in 2009 and a Master of Environmental Planning and Design degree in 2014 from the University of Georgia. He is an avid college football fan and also enjoys spending time hiking, cycling, and traveling. His primary duties are working on planning issues and CDBG projects.

LaCarole was born in Columbus and grew up in Hurtsboro, Alabama. She graduated from Russell County High School and received a Bachelor of Science degree in social work from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. After graduating, she worked for the State of Alabama as a CPS social worker. She also worked with seniors as a social worker at Magnolia Manor in Columbus for a short time. She is married and has three kids. She enjoys shopping, traveling, cooking, and spending time with her family.

Hudson elected GARC chair

Past RVRC Council Chair Terrell Hudson is serving as the 2016 chair of the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions. He is pictured at the GARC meeting held in November at St. Simons.

New RVRC office in Columbus

The next time you are in Columbus stop by our new offices, located at 710 Front Avenue.
WIOA participant driving toward a new career

Luvin Stewart a WIOA participant from Sumter County is ready to begin training for commercial truck driving. He chose this program of study because he thought it would be a good career choice that was full of employment opportunities.

Luvin knows it will be difficult being away from his family but truck driving will provide the income and long-term employment potential he needs to support his family. He looks forward to starting training and obtaining his Commercial Driver License (CDL).

Luvin will attend Truck Drive Institute (TDI). During the program, which lasts three to four weeks, TDI students receive classroom instruction, hands-on training on the campus driving range and actual road driving experience. Individuals like the short-term CDL training offered by TDI as it allows them to obtain their licenses quickly and join the workforce. TDI recruits for all the large trucking companies and assists participants with obtaining employment.

Christmas at the Park

Area Agency on Aging staff attended the Chattahoochee County Christmas at the Park on December 5 to share information about the Georgia Cares program and services for seniors.

RVRC receives NADO Innovation Award

The RVRC received a 2015 Innovation Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Research Foundation for the “Show Your Love of the River Valley” photo contest conducted in February 2015.

“The contest helped create awareness about historic sites, our downtowns, natural resources and the places people consider important and beautiful in the River Valley,” said RVRC Executive Director Patti Cullen. “The contest also served as a means to further promote the RVRC’s mission to increase tourism and other economic development endeavors in the region.”

NADO’s Innovation Awards program recognizes regional development organizations and partnering organizations for improving the economic and community competitiveness of our nation’s regions and local communities. Award-winning projects were honored during NADO’s 2015 Annual Training Conference, held October 24-27 in New Orleans.
Dept. of Revenue Commissioner speaks at RVRC Council meeting

Georgia Department of Revenue Commissioner Lynne Riley spoke to the RVRC Council at the November 18 Council meeting. She gave an overview of the mission and duties of Department of Revenue.

Riley said her goal is to make sure that each person who comes in contact with the Department of Revenue is provided with excellent customer service. She has conducted open houses at each of the 11 regional offices this year inviting the public to come and ask questions about the Department of Revenue. In addition to administering tax laws, the department is responsible for enforcing laws and regulations pertaining to the control of alcoholic beverages and tobacco products as well as motor vehicle tag and title administration.

She said Georgia was a voluntary tax compliance state and that her office relies on citizens to let them know if something is not right.

Vienna receives GICH award

Vienna was one of eight cities recognized by the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) program for its efforts to increase affordable housing and to revitalize its community. Others recognized were Covington, Gainesville, Pembroke, Rome, Thomasville, Valdosta, and Washington. Awards were presented at the “Celebrating a Decade of Success” event held October 21 at the UGA Georgia Center in Athens.

Vienna took home the Neighborhood Revitalization Award for a community with fewer than 5,000 residents for its execution of a three-point approach toward revitalization. The approach included aggressive steps against blight in Vienna’s neighborhoods by revisiting the city’s code and making necessary changes; determining the condition of existing housing stock; and looking for ways to assist owners of substandard and near-substandard properties in making improvements to their homes.

Since 2009, Vienna has demolished 16 dilapidated homes, removed or demolished 21 substandard mobile homes, and had 36 junked vehicles removed. This has resulted in providing property that is now available for infill construction, in the creation of two recycling stations, and in residents taking an active role in keeping their own communities clean.

An additional 27 homes have been or are on the schedule to be reconstructed or rehabilitated using Community HOME Investment Program (CHIP) Grant funds.
CARE-NET presents caregiver awards

The West Central Georgia CARE-NET held its bi-monthly meeting on December 10, 2015, at the Columbus Library on Macon Road.

During the meeting, caregiver awards were presented to Sherrill Fore and Belita Stafford Walker. Sherrill Fore, a para-professional caregiver with Innovative Senior Solutions in Americus, was presented the 2015 Georgia Paraprofessional Caregiver of the Year award. Belita Stafford Walker, family caregiver to several family members, was presented the 2015 West Central Georgia Regional Family Caregiver of the Year award.

Dealing with Dementia Behavior Training

Certificates were presented to members of the West Central CARE-NET for completion of the “Dealing with Dementia Behavior” training. This training is taught by the River Valley AAA and includes training for family caregivers, as well as professional caregivers. A class for professional caregivers is scheduled for April 13, 2016.

Membership in the West Central Georgia CARE-NET is open to all family and professional caregivers. Professional caregivers interested in the Dealing with Dementia training, please contact Linda Harris at 706-256-2937 or email lharris@rivervalleyrcaaa.org.

Dealing with Dementia Behavior Training

Linda Harris, CARE-NET Coordinator, presented certificates to participants who completed the “Dealing with Dementia Behavior” training. Pictured (from left) are Linda Harris, Dr. Janet Bussey, Cheri Nolan, Dr. Rhonda K. Hollis, Nettie Andrews, Glenda Boynton, and Gennie Jackson.
Biofuel plant to be built in Dooly County

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced on December 10 a conditional commitment for a $70 million loan guarantee to help build a cellulosic bio-refinery in Dooly County. USDA is providing the loan guarantee conditional commitment, an important milestone in the ongoing development of the project, through its Biorefinery Assistance Program.

"There is a clear consumer demand for clean, American-made, renewable fuels, which our rural communities stand ready to meet," said Secretary Vilsack.

Ensyn Georgia Biorefinery I, LLC will construct and operate a cellulosic biofuel plant, which will produce 20 million gallons of renewable fuel per year employing its Rapid Thermal Processing (RTP) technology. RTP uses a fast thermal process to convert non-food-based feedstocks into biobased fuels.

Ensyn will convert 440 dry tons of woody biomass into a renewable fuel oil product. There is an abundant supply of woody biomass near the plant due to excess forest materials in the region. However, Ensyn can use a variety of other non-food cellulosic feedstocks as well.

The renewable fuel oil will be used as a heating oil replacement and as a renewable feedstock for diesel and gasoline production at refineries.

The project will lead to the direct employment of up to 138 people, including nearly 70 permanent jobs when the plant is fully operational.

Ensyn has a 25-year track record with its RTP technology and currently supports the operation of six commercial RTP facilities. The company has additional commercial plants under development in Canada and Brazil with its joint venture partners.

Citi is the Lender of Record under the loan guarantee.

Biofuel plant to be built in Dooly County

New Presidential Pathways Project Manager

Holly Winner has joined the GDEcD Tourism Division Team as the regional tourism project manager for Presidential Pathways. Previously she was the director of development for the Roosevelt Warm Springs Development Fund. She holds two Bachelor of Arts degrees, art history and journalism, one from Georgia College & State University and the second from Georgia State University. Winner will be based in LaGrange.

Presidential Pathways is a 20-county region that includes the following River Valley counties: Chattahoochee, Crisp, Dooly, Harris, Macon, Marion, Muscogee, Schley, Stewart, Sumter, Talbot, Taylor and Webster.
The River Valley GeorgiaCares office held a Be Senior Savvy Health and Resource Fair at the Mildred L. Terry Library in Columbus on December 4. More than 70 seniors attended the event and received information from local vendors. Columbus Councillor Pops Barnes (pictured at right) was one of the speakers at the event.

During the Be Senior Savvy event participants were able to visit the Fort Valley State University Mobile Unit for Medicare assistance. HCBS Case Manager Kimberly Bellamy (far left) is pictured getting information about Medicare from Rhonda Hollis, GeorgiaCares volunteer aboard the FVSU Mobile Unit.
Harris County receives REBA funds
The Development Authority of Harris County was awarded $200,000 in Regional Economic Business Assistance (REBA) funds to assist in the location of a new logistics and distribution center which will serve the KIA plant in West Point. Glovis Georgia, LLC, will create 190 new jobs and invest $16 million within 48 months. The estimated project cost is $17,208,225.

Montezuma receives ITD grant
The City of Montezuma in Macon County was awarded $42,058 in interim assistance to demolish a collapsed building and stabilize the surrounding buildings through the CDBG/ITD program.

Columbus-Muscogee recognized as PlanFirst Community
Columbus-Muscogee County was one of seven communities that the Georgia Department of Community Affairs recognized on November 18 as achieving the PlanFirst designation for 2016. PlanFirst recognizes excellence in community planning and acknowledges communities that have a proven track record of implementing their plan and a history of good plan development. The designation will last for three years and enables these communities to take advantage of various incentives that include public visibility, eligibility for funding, and reduced interest rates on certain DCA and Georgia Environmental Finance Authority programs. May 15 is the next deadline for applications.