BYROMVILLE RECEIVES ITD GRANT

The Town of Byromville received an Immediate Threat and Danger Grant in the amount of $35,623 from the Department of Community Affairs for repairs to a failed water filtration system. The grant will pay for half the repair costs. The Town of Byromville will pay the remainder of the costs for the project. All 443 residents will benefit from the restoration of a safe and sanitary water supply.

“Because of its small size, the residents of Byromville consider themselves a town rather than a city, and we are proud of our town,” said Mayor Cheryl Foster, who was ecstatic at the news of the grant.

Mayor Foster and the Town Council have done a remarkable job of bringing Byromville back from the edge of financial disaster.

“We would like to especially thank DCA and the RVRC for their help in getting us these funds,” Mayor Foster added. “We hope to have the filtration system up and running as soon as possible.”

From the Executive Director’s Desk...

The December 2013 issue of Planning, the magazine for the American Planning Association, really began to make me think about what the River Valley Regional Commission does and how our staff contributes to the communities in our region. In planning school one of the first things I learned is that planning is all about creating a sense of community, a community’s genius loci, where our spatial environment intersects with the realities of our lives. An example of this is how the solution of a health or safety issue affects jobs and income in the region. Another example is how a school siting may affect existing neighborhoods and businesses. The December Planning issue continued on to recognize the 30 great places in America in terms of public spaces, streets and neighborhoods.

I believe, as we begin this new year, that each of us should take time to reflect on our communities, to find that truly great public space, street, or neighborhood in our cities and counties and make sure they remain truly special, something uniquely different from anywhere else, our genius loci. The staff of the River Valley Regional Commission is, as always, committed to assisting each of you in creating great spaces in your towns and our region. We look forward to working with all of you in 2014! Patti
Caregiver of the Year Award

The West Central Georgia CARE-NET held its quarterly meeting on December 17, 2013, at the River Valley Area Agency on Aging in Columbus. During the meeting the West Central Georgia Family Caregiver of the year award was presented to Care Net member Mrs. Glenda Boynton.

Mrs. Boynton and her husband John live in Harris County and are caregivers to their adult son John Jr., who was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy at birth. She is also caregiver to her mother, who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, and served as a caregiver for an aunt who recently passed away. In addition to her caregiver responsibilities with her own family, she volunteers for several civic organizations in her community. She is a volunteer with the Alzheimer’s Association and participates in annual Alzheimer walks. She has worked with the Easter Seals Foundation and has been a team captain for the March of Dimes.

A strong advocate for caregivers, Boynton has traveled to Atlanta the past three years and met with Governor Deal on behalf of caregivers. She provides a wealth of information to friends and family who are faced with the challenges of caregiving.

The West Central Georgia CARE-NET, developed by Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving, is a volunteer coalition of family and professional caregivers who advocate for the support and well-being of caregivers. For more information, contact Linda Harris, CARE-NET Coordinator at (706) 256-2939 or by email at lharris@rivervalleyrcaaa.org.

Dr. MLK Jr. Advisory Council Endorses Historical Marker

On behalf of the Sumter County Commissioners, the RVRC staff completed and submitted a $2,500 grant application to the Georgia Historical Society to aid in funding a new historical marker recognizing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

King was incarcerated in the Sumter County Jail on December 16, 1961, for leading a civil rights march in Albany. He was arrested during the march and held in the Sumter County facility for his protection. The marker will be located on the Sumter County Courthouse property in Americus. The county still has the cell doors behind which King was held and will use them as part of the celebration when the marker is erected and at other specific times each year.

The MLK Jr. Advisory Council for the River Valley Region approved and endorsed the application. The council received letters of endorsement from President Jimmy Carter, Congressman Sanford Bishop, and the State of Georgia MLK Jr. Advisory Council.

River Valley Region residents named ‘Most Influential Georgians’

Four people from the River Valley Region were named to Georgia Trend magazine’s 16th edition of the “100 Most Influential Georgians” list.

Congratulations to Will Harris, president of White Oak Pastures in Bluffton; Timothy Mescon, president of Columbus State University; Kessell Stelling Jr., chairman and CEO of Synovus in Columbus; and Teresa Tomlinson, mayor of Columbus.

The magazine article stated: “Some of the 100 wield their influence in the limelight; others work behind the scenes. But all of them impact the daily lives of Georgians everywhere.”
GIS Day

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) is an integrative approach using software as a means of creating and analyzing maps and data. GIS Manager Mariyana Kostov and GIS Specialist Cassie Myers use the computer software to create maps for presenting various types of information.

To call attention to this technology, Esri, an international supplier of GIS software and materials, promotes “GIS Day” each year in November. First held in 1999, the celebration is a grassroots effort to showcase the uses of GIS, inspire others to discover and explore its benefits, and to build local communities of GIS users.

Kostov and Myers attended Sumter County Primary School on November 20 to celebrate GIS Day with students. The pair set up in the library and handed out materials to students of all grades. Students received temporary tattoos, colored pencil sets, bracelets, and of course, maps. Kostov and Myers explained what GIS is and how it can be helpful, the importance of maps and the knowledge of how to use them. Kostov and Myers plan on celebrating GIS Day with students again next year.

The Economics of Main Street Communities in the River Valley

Georgia is a national leader in the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Main Street Initiative, which has helped revitalize central business districts across the state. Since its inception in 1980 with a pilot of five communities, DCA’s Georgia Main Street Network of cities has added 55,990 net new jobs for the state’s workforce and has seen 11,643 net new business starts that invested nearly $3 billion in public and private projects ranging from streetscapes to building rehabilitations and new construction. Today there are 96 cities participating in the Georgia Main Streets network.

Main Street focuses on a nationally recognized 4-Point Approach™ to community revitalization. With a foundation in historic preservation, the initiative is built upon organization, design, promotion, and economic restructuring for downtown success.

2013 Economic Impact in the River Valley
65 Net New Jobs
$15.3 million in Public/Private Investment
8 Net New Businesses
5 Building Rehabilitations
10,483 Volunteer Hours

The designated Main Street communities in the River Valley Region are: Americus, Columbus, Cordele, Montezuma, Oglethorpe, Richland, and Vienna.

Each Main Street community is required to submit online monthly activity reports as part of its program accreditation. Each community is required to report new business starts, business closings, total public and private investment, and volunteer support among other key data.
Cindy Richardson

Cindy Richardson is an adult student in the WIA-funded GED Plus program at the Paxen Learning Center in Americus. Cindy worked hard and studied while she was enrolled in the GED Plus class she attended. She passed each of the five individual GED tests, but did not score enough points overall to earn her GED Certificate.

Cindy persevered, though. She attended tutoring classes and individual tutoring sessions, and she worked online and at home on her own to improve her testing skills. In November 2013, Cindy obtained the required points and earned her GED certificate.

This has really boosted Cindy’s confidence level and she is now working and is about to start classes at South Georgia Technical College. Cindy hopes to work as a probation officer when she graduates from SGTC.

Crisp County Youth Detention Center partners with OJT Program

The WIA On-the-Job Training (OJT) coordinates WIA-eligible job seekers with local OJT participating employers that are hiring employees. OJT coordinators work with the WIA-eligible participants and employers to develop a successful job match to ensure both the participant’s and the employer’s needs are met. When making a job match, the coordinator considers the participant’s occupational interest, skills and abilities, and the employer’s specified job duties and requirements. The employer interviews and makes the final hiring decision on selecting the WIA participants for employment.

Crisp County Youth Detention Center (YDC) has been an OJT participating employer for several years. The YDC has utilized the WIA OJT services to hire correctional officers for their facility. The Crisp YDC and Administrator Mable Wheeler have been very supportive and a wonderful partner for the OJT program.

For more information on the WIA OJT services, contact Dawn Ward or Shea Wells at Heart of Georgia Middle Flint Employment and Training at (229) 273-4568.

River Valley GeorgiaCares provides Medicare assistance

The River Valley GeorgiaCares Program teamed up with Fort Valley State University to bring its traveling mobile unit to the Greater Peace Baptist Church in Opelika, Alabama. The FVSU mobile unit has been all over the state of Georgia since 2011. The mobile unit is equipped with 10 Internet-ready computers and printers to assist Medicare beneficiaries and the local community. GeorgiaCares Coordinator Shameika Averett (left) is pictured with Daphane Farley and Kathie Tharpe of the Alabama SHIP office.
Pine trees are widely distributed conifers, lacking true flowers with seeds forming in cones instead. Conifers include nearly 500 species in five families, and of these, the Pine family is the largest and best known. Compared to hardwoods, pines tend to have higher survival and growth rates, are more tolerant of low-nutrient, shallow soils, and are better accommodated to persist in fluctuating weather and droughts.

The south is especially rich in its pine trees, with 10 native species. In recent years, much attention has been given to the longleaf pine in both research and restoration efforts. The longleaf pine once stood in vast pure stands stretching from Virginia to Texas, comprising an estimated 90,000,000 acres. Following the European settlement, however, overexploitation and poorly managed clear cutting practices left the species covering less than 5 percent of its original habitat. To compensate for the ever-growing timber demand, plantations of the faster growing loblolly and other pine species began to take the place of the natural majestic longleaf stands.

The replacement of longleafs with substitute pines has caused damage to a relatively fragile ecosystem; the habitat supplied by these trees is highly sought after by endangered and keystone species alike. For example, the gopher tortoise prefers its home to be among longleaf pines, which provide adequate light for a diversity of low-level shrubs and plants. The tortoise creates burrows that are then used by a multitude of other species; some sources claim up to 300 types of other animals rely on the tortoise burrows for shelter as well as hunting and breeding grounds.

Longleafs are named for their drooping needles, which can reach 10-15 inches and are found in clusters of three. The cones are 6-10 inches, the largest of any southern pine. Special to this species is the “grass stage,” which it enters during its first few years. During this time, the tree develops in thickness rather than height, and the taproot develops rapidly. Feral hogs tend to root up these younger trees and devour the taproot. These trees can require up to 150 years to reach maturity and can live up to 500 years; they prefer sandy, well-draining soils.

For more information, visit the Longleaf Alliance’s website at www.longleafalliance.org.

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**Lt. Governor visits Shellman**

The area was honored to have Lt. Governor Casey Cagle visit and meet with officials in October to discuss the economy of the state. The meeting was held at the Back Porch Restaurant in Shellman, and several elected officials and others attended. Cagle (center) is pictured with State Senator Freddie Simms Powell (District 12) and Erik Vonk of Richland Rum. While in the area, Cagle also visited the newly constructed Sumter Phoebe Hospital in Americus, which replaced the old hospital that was severely damaged in the March 2007 tornado.
Save the Date
The annual Legislative Luncheon will be May 28 at the Josh Gibson Center in Buena Vista.

WIA participants graduate from Law Enforcement Academy

WIA participants Rodrigo Guitron and Carlos Felton recently graduated from the South Georgia Technical College Law Enforcement Academy (LEA). The LEA cadets undergo 18 weeks and more than 700 hours of intense training mentally and physically.

LEA graduates receive their Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) certification, which enables them to enter employment in the law enforcement area.

South Georgia Technical College is one of six technical colleges in Georgia to offer the law enforcement training program.

Rodrigo Guitron is a resident of Dooly County and has been offered employment with Georgia Southwestern State University Campus Security Department. Carlos Felton is a resident of Macon County and has applied for employment with Fort Valley State University Campus Security Department.

SGTC WIA Coordinator Sandhya Muljibhai stated that both of these participants are very hard working, goal oriented and have great customer service skills. “Any company would be lucky to hire these individuals.”

Hispanic Community gets a helping hand just in time for Christmas

Staff from GeorgiaCares and the River Valley Aging and Disability Resource Connection attended the Annual Iglesia de Dios Nuevo Pacto and Community Outreach Health Fair on December 14, 2013. More than 300 people from the local Hispanic community attended the event.

There were several vendors providing information and resources as well as health screenings, a clothing giveaway table, and City Councilman Jerry “Pops” Barnes, who is also a registered nurse, provided blood pressure screenings.

Teel retires as Pine Mountain mayor

Joey Teel retired as Pine Mountain mayor on December 31 after 16 years in office. He was honored with a reception in December. Jim Trott took office as the new mayor as of January 1, 2014. Photo courtesy of Andy Kober.
An RVRC Christmas

The RVRC staff enjoyed a Christmas party on Dec. 20 in Richland with good food, games, and singing of carols, including this one written by Emily Chambers especially for the RVRC. *(To the tune of “O Christmas Tree”)*

RVRC! RVRC!
A pillar of society
In Talbot, Macon, and Dooly
In Sumter and Muscogee
Cusseta-Chattahoochee and
Clay, Stewart, Crisp and Marion
In Webster, Taylor, Harris, Schley Quitman and Randolph Counties!

RVRC! RVRC!
Exceptional employees
Experience and expertise
With JARC and CDBGs
They’ll move you from the nursing home
Or give you a small business loan
RVRC! RVRC!
Improving the Economy!

RVRC! RVRC!
The Agency on Aging
WIA and Planning
Successfully Engaging
Communities and Governments
In Regional Development
RVRC! RVRC!
Ever collaborating!

RVRC! RVRC!
The beacon of Communities
RVRC! RVRC!
With numerous activities
Like Tour de Farm and Bike to Work
Or finding where the wild hogs lurk
RVRC! RVRC!
Your candle shines so brightly!

See a video of the staff singing on the RVRC Facebook page.

Staff Spotlight

Mary A. Day is the assistant director of the River Valley Area Agency on Aging. Mary has a Bachelor of Science degree in human resource management and a minor in accounting from Troy State University. Mary began working with AAA in 1996 as the monitor/contract manager and was promoted to assistant director in 1999. Her responsibilities include monitoring providers and assisting with the development and implementation of a Comprehensive Area Plan for older and disabled adults and their caregivers.

Mary lives in Columbus with her husband and is the proud mother of three sons, two daughters-in-law, and seven grandchildren. In her spare time she enjoys traveling, and spending time with her husband, children, and grandchildren.

Grant Richardson is a community developer who has been working in the Americus office since 2006. Grant has a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Georgia Southwestern State University. He has spent time writing and administering various grant applications to help the RVRC region. Grant enjoys aviation, hunting, gardening, do-it-yourself projects, and anything with an engine.

Grant and his wife Amy are the proud parents of Andrew, who was born October 11, 2013.

FY13 RVRC Annual Financial Report

River Valley Regional Commission’s Finance Department, in conjunction with the audit firm of Clifton, Lipford, Hardison & Parker, LLC, has completed the Annual Financial Report for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2013. The auditors issued an unmodified opinion of both the financial statements and the audit on compliance for major programs with no findings or questioned costs. They also reported no material weaknesses or significant deficiencies in internal control over financial reporting or major programs.

The Annual Financial Report includes the Basic Financial Statements of the RVRC as well as Supplementary Information such as Combining and Individual Fund Statements and Schedules. The report also includes the Management’s Discussion and Analysis which provides a narrative overview and analysis of the financial activities of the Commission for the year.

The River Valley RC Annual Financial Report for fiscal year 2013 is available to any interested party and can be downloaded via the RVRC website at www.rivervalleyrc.org/Downloads.htm.
Governor Nathan Deal announced the appointment of Maggie McGruther, Richard McCorkle and the reappointment of Noel Williams to the River Valley Regional Commission Council.

Maggie McGruther serves as the Archway Professional in Sumter County and connects the community to University of Georgia resources to address priorities identified by local leaders: public health, community-wide economic development, leadership development, and public education. Previously McGruther served as a tourism project manager with the Georgia Department of Economic Development and as executive director at the Monticello-Jasper County Chamber of Commerce. McGruther is a 2001 graduate of Auburn University with a degree in industrial design.

Richard McCorkle has served as superintendent of Marion County Schools since 1999. A native of Marion County, he graduated from Marion County High School, received a B.S. in education from Georgia Southwestern University, a M.S. in education from Troy State University, and an Ed.S. in education from Columbus State University. He taught at Tri-County High School from 1987-1997 and was principal there from 1997 to 1999.

Additionally, Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle reappointed Mitchell Watkins to the council and Speaker of the House David Ralston reappointed Dr. Carole Rutland.

“We welcome Maggie and Richard to the council and look forward to continuing to work with Noel, Mitch, and Carole as we strive to improve the quality of life in our region,” said Patti Cullen, RVRC executive director. “Their expertise will be invaluable as we move forward with many of our regional endeavors.”