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From the Executive Director’s Desk...

Hopefully, by the time you are reading this our federal government will have come to their senses and be back up and running. The partisan bickering going on now is threatening the livelihoods for thousands of people in the River Valley region. Federal employees at Fort Benning have been furloughed, the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and the Andersonville National Historic Site have been closed, Head Start Services have been halted in many of our schools, and many federal services that we take for granted each day have come to an abrupt halt.

Our staff is monitoring the effects of the shutdown on many of the programs that we implement. AAA staff is in daily contact with the state and is developing a plan to still serve our seniors with meals in case transportation has to be stopped and seniors can no longer go to a senior center or meals cannot be delivered to their homes. Our EDA staff is continuing to work even though we have no one to contact in Atlanta or Washington about possible projects. Community Development Block Grant projects now underway may see a slowing of payments because there is no one at the federal level to process the drawdowns.

We will continue to monitor the status of all these programs and will work with each of you to try and make sure that money still comes to our region. Like I said hopefully by the time you read this the federal government is back up and running and this is only a bump in the road to our overall economic recovery.
The City of Richland received $432,133 for downtown redevelopment. Pictured are Rep. Bentley, City Clerk Vicki Wainwright, Mayor Barry Whitley, Commissioner Corbin, Patti Cullen, and Grant Richardson.

The City of Cordele received $500,000 for sewer improvements. Pictured are (from left) Grant Richardson, Director of Housing and Urban Development Irene Cantrell, Patti Cullen, Community Development Office Secretary Rita Bass, City Manager Edward Beach, Commissioner Corbin, and Councilman Curtis Lucas.

The City of Vienna received $420,897 for sewer system improvements. Pictured are Patti Cullen, Buddy Strength, Rep. Bentley, Commissioner Corbin, and City Administrator and Clerk Gail Bembry.

The City of Cuthbert received $500,000 for housing rehabilitation. Pictured are Rep. Greene, Lance Renfrow, Commissioner Corbin, Patti Cullen, and Mayor Steve Whatley.

The City of Butler received $500,000 for sewer improvements. Pictured are Rep. Bentley, City Clerk Vicki Wainwright, Mayor Barry Whitley, Commissioner Corbin, Patti Cullen, and Grant Richardson.

Macon County received a $500,000 Employment Incentive Program grant. Pictured are Patti Cullen, Buddy Strength, Commissioner Corbin, and Rep. Bentley.

Employment Incentive Program and Redevelopment Grants

The City of Richland received $432,133 for downtown redevelopment. Pictured are Grant Richardson, Cassie Myers, Patti Cullen, Commissioner Corbin, Lance Renfrow, and Rep. Greene.
2013 Community Development Block Grants

Marion County received $500,000 for streets and drainage improvements. Pictured are Grant Richardson, Patti Cullen, Commissioner Corbin, and Chairman George Neal.

The City of Ideal received $250,000 for water system improvements. Pictured are Buddy Strength, Rep. Bentley, Commissioner Corbin, and Patti Cullen.

The City of Reynolds received $500,000 for water and sewer improvements. Pictured are Grant Richardson, Mayor Fredrick Waller, Rep. Bentley, and Commissioner Corbin.

Staff Spotlight

The RVRC welcomes two new staff members: Jim Livingston and Mia Anderson.

Jim Livingston is a new planner working in the Columbus office. He has spent time working in rural North Carolina and New Orleans on redevelopment, planning and economic development issues. His work has been recognized by the City of New Orleans, the New Orleans City Council, as well as local newspapers for his leadership in the re-development and revitalization of New Orleans post-Katrina. Jim has also worked on rural Main Street development projects and helped bring a 6.5 MW solar installation to a community of 2,400 people in rural North Carolina. He is a graduate of Davidson College with a degree in history, and a graduate of the University of Florida with a M.A. in political science and a certificate in public affairs. Jim is also an Eagle Scout and volunteers his time coaching chess at a local elementary school.

Mia Anderson is the marketing manager/assistant planner and is based in the Americus office. Mia has a bachelor’s degree in mass communication from the University of North Carolina at Asheville. She worked in the newspaper business for 12 years as a reporter, editor and publisher. She also has experience in public relations and non-profit management. Mia and her husband, Tom Overton, moved to Americus in September 2012. She serves on the advisory board for Books for Sumter Children and enjoys yoga, reading and gardening.

State Superintendent Speaks to Council

State School Superintendent Dr. John Barge was the guest speaker at the River Valley Regional Commission Council meeting on August 28. Dr. Barge spoke to the Council about how education relates to the economy. He said businesses are attracted to a community by good school systems and an educated workforce is essential to meet the needs of area businesses. Dr. Barge stressed education is economic development.
On September 3, Mariyana Kostov (her last name is now Kostov, not Kostova) was sworn in as a U.S. citizen in a formal ceremony at the courthouse in Columbus. She was one of the 38 people from 36 counties to pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.

The RVRC’s two planning directors, Gerald Mixon and Rick Morris, attended the ceremony and were among the first to congratulate the new citizen and her family.

Mariyana was brought to tears when she saw that her friends and colleagues at the Americus office decorated her office with red, white and blue balloons and flags and took her to lunch to celebrate her citizenship. She was presented with a U.S. gold flag charm with the year 2013 engraved on the back. At the September RVRC Council meeting, Executive Director Patti Cullen presented Mariyana with a U.S. flag for her home. She was invited to the 8th ACCG meeting on October 28 to lead the Pledge of Allegiance. Mariyana and her husband will execute their voting rights for the first time in the November local elections.

Pam Washington has joined the staff of Paxen Learning (WIA Service Provider – GED Plus) as an instructor for the Cordele GED Plus training site. She recently finished her first GED Plus class group in Cordele.

Pam is a native of the Cordele/Crisp County area. She graduated from the Crisp County School System and has a bachelor’s degree from Albany State University. Pam has worked for the Department of Juvenile Justice, Southwest Key, and served as a substitute teacher.

“I feel so blessed to give back to my community in such a life-changing way,” Pam said.

Pam has truly had a wonderful impact on the participants in her first class as stated in the poem (at right) written by Shatillia Kearse. Ms. Kearse recently scored 670 on the writing section of the GED examination and has also earned her GED with the help of the Paxen Learning staff.

“I tripped up on decisions and mistakes led me astray
I fell short upon society and traveled the wrong way.
My city full of murder, blood sweat and tears.
But somehow I had to make-up for my many wasted years.
So along came Paxen Learning. Something to change my way.

But little did I know what was coming into play.
A mixture of personalities, attitudes and goals.
For not everyone would make it someone was bound to go.
A teacher who was genuine and wants what’s best to come.
She doesn’t judge our character nor judge what we’ve done.
She reaches deep within us and pulls out the best.
Instilling in us the things we need to pass the test.
For the end is finally coming and what an experience I’ve had.

We set it at high standards for the upcoming class.
I will now have foundation to build my kids upon
For they are my motivation and the reason I’m so strong.
Paxen has made history.
Yep, we are class number 2, but number 1 is what we feel.
For dreams do come true
To all my fellow classmates, I hold you in my heart
Don’t see this as the end, for it’s just a new start.
Truck Driver Institute
Commercial Truck Driver Training

Commercial truck driving is an occupation that consistently has available job openings even when unemployment rates are high. Truck drivers impact our daily life by transporting many items and products we use every day.

WIA has assisted individuals with training for commercial truck driving for many years and relies on technical colleges and private truck driving trainers to conduct this training. Eligible WIA participants can choose the approved truck driver training provider that best meets their needs.

One CDL training provider the WIA program partners with is Truck Driver Institute (TDI) located in Forsyth.

Truck Driver Institute, Inc. is a private commercial truck driver training provider and has been training drivers since 1973. TDI has 12 campuses in eight states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas).

TDI offers short-term (3 weeks) commercial truck driver training. The training course runs Monday – Friday from 7 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. daily. Students begin their training in the classroom, progress to the driving range, and complete the course by driving on public roadways. TDI provides job placement for trainees. They train for more than 25 nationwide trucking carriers such as U.S Express, Stevens Transport, BTC, Werner Enterprises, Schneider, TMC, and ROEHL.

The WIA program has used the training services of TDI for commercial truck driver training for many years. TDI has 100 percent job placement rate for the local area WIA participants.

WIA Participant – Student of Excellence

WIA participant Julian Taylor was selected as the September “Student of Excellence” for South Georgia Technical College (SGTC). Julian is enrolled at SGTC in the Air Conditioning Technology program.

SGTC WIA Coordinator Sandhya Muljibhai stated Julian is a great student to have in the WIA program. He is very goal oriented and very appreciative of the help he receives from the WIA program. Julian is dedicated to his education as he travels 106 miles round trip each day to attend training, and according to his instructors, he is always on time for his classes.

Julian is also a member of the SkillsUSA club and a member of the National Technical Honor Society. Instructor Glynn Cobb stated Julian stood out among his students as he is involved on campus and has an excellent Grade Point Average (GPA).

Julian received a plaque of recognition, financial award from SGTC, and a Student of Excellence T-shirt.

Lunch and Learn

The next Lunch and Learn will be held on November 13 at 11 a.m. at the RVRC office in Americus.

Lauren Cleland from the tourism division of the Georgia Department of Economic Development will talk about using social media to market your events. She also will talk about partnering with the state to help attract more people to your event or attraction.

Cleland is the new media specialist for the tourism division and the voice of @ExploreGeorgia on social media.

There is no charge to attend, but everyone is asked to bring $10 to pay for their lunch. Contact Katie Howard at khoward@rivervalleyrc.org or call (706) 256-2910 to let Katie know you are coming.
Caregivers Complete “Powerful Tools for Caregivers” Training

Direct Services Corporation of Columbus and the River Valley Area Agency on Aging held a Powerful Tools for Caregiving training July 31 – September 4. Powerful Tools for Caregiving is a six-week evidenced based education program that equips caregivers with the tools and strategies they need to better handle the unique challenges that caregivers face.

The curriculum includes topics such as Self-Care Behaviors, Management of Emotions, Self-Efficacy, and the Use of Community Resources. The training included a morning class and an evening class at Edgewood Presbyterian Church in Columbus.

Class leaders conducting the morning classes were Linda Harris, HCBS Case Manager at River Valley AAA, and Patricia Collins CCSP Case Manager at Direct Services Corporation. Class leaders Paula Wright-Webb and Kendra Coleman, CCSP Case Managers at Direct Services Corporation conducted the evening classes.

For more information on caregiver services, contact Linda Harris at 706-256-2939 or lharris@rivervalleyrcaaa.org.
Bicycle Rodeo in Midtown

On July 20, 2013, the RVRC along with its partners, Columbus Police Department Bicycle Unit and Eastern Heights Baptist Church, held a children’s bicycle rodeo in Midtown Columbus.

All 25 participants received a free helmet and both children and parents were taught how to properly fit bicycle helmets. Participants also took part in a bicycle obstacle course, which teaches riders the importance of bicycle handling and signaling your moves while on a bicycle. The Columbus PD Bicycle Unit robot, “Spot,” taught a safety and road etiquette course. Overall, the rodeo benefited many residents of the Eastern Heights community in Midtown.

Julio Portillo, RVRC Regional Community and Bicycle-Pedestrian Planner, and RVRC intern Catie McRae are pictured with “Spot” and a representative from the Columbus Police Department.

Sport Fish Consumption Guidelines

Sport fish in Georgia are generally of good quality and safe to eat. Replacing a high-fat source of protein with fish could have substantial health benefits. For safety measures, Georgia Department of Natural Resources samples fish yearly for contaminants such as PCBs, mercury, and chlorodane.

Fish tested from the following water bodies in our region were found to have little to no contaminants, and no restrictions on consumption have been recommended: Walter F. George, Chattahoochee River (Stewart and Chattahoochee counties), and Upatoi Creek.

Fish from locations in the table above were found to have some contaminants, and because of this, some restrictions should be placed on how often these types are consumed. For the purposes of this table, a “meal” is considered to be 4-8 ounces.

Following the guidelines provided should cause no significant health risks, but taking steps to reduce risk even further should not be overlooked. First, eat smaller fish and vary the type. Contaminants build up with each trophic level; top predators and bottom feeders, as well as older and larger fish, will more than likely contain higher levels of pollutants. Second, be sure to clean and cook fish properly; contaminants will build up in the fatty tissues of fish. Removing the skin and trimming the fat will drastically reduce the level of contaminants. Lastly, cook fish so the fat drips away. Broil, bake, or grill fish to remove the most contaminants.

Women who are pregnant, nursing, or planning to become pregnant, as well as children under 6, are more sensitive to contaminants and may want to consume even less than these recommendations.

More details on fish contaminant testing can be found in the publication “Guidelines for Eating Fish from Georgia Waters,” which is available online at www.gaepd.org.
Randolph County Quilt Square Dedication

On September 18, 2013, Randolph County became one of seven counties in Georgia to participate in the Southern Quilt Trail. The first Quilt Trail began in 2001 in Adams County, Ohio. The idea took root and now there are quilt trails in 44 states with more than 4,000 sites.

The Southern Quilt Trail began in 2008 in Powder Springs, Georgia. Quilt patterns are painted on 4-foot or 8-foot square boards and mounted to a building or structure within a community. In order to be registered as part of the Southern Quilt Trail, the original quilt must be hand-pieced or hand appliqued and must have some connection to the structure on which it is displayed. The building on which the quilt pattern is displayed should be at least 50 years old, on a hard surface road with the quilt square clearly visible from the road, and the site must be well kept.

The Randolph County Historical Society made application to the Southern Quilt Trail to participate in the program in November 2012. They submitted three quilt designs and three sites for the paintings. The designs were a “Starburst,” a “Bearclaw,” and a “T” pattern. The display sites were the Shellman Train Depot (Shellman), Reddick’s Store (Cuthbert) and Hixon Hardware (Cuthbert).

In January 2013, the Randolph County Historical Society learned its quilt squares had been approved. The squares were painted in April and mounted to the buildings in June 2013. Descriptive plaques were added in July 2013.