**Macon County Awarded $500,000 EIP Grant**

Macon County was awarded a CDBG Employment Incentive Program (EIP) grant for $500,000 for a rail spur to help the Imerys Company to deliver its product throughout the United States and the world. The Imerys plant was enlarged to produce particles used for induced hydraulic fracturing, commonly known as “fracking”, a technique used to release petroleum, natural gas (including shale gas, tight gas, and coal seam gas), or other substances for extraction. This technique creates fractures from a wellbore drilled into reservoir rock formations. These particles are injected into the areas as the petroleum products are removed, preventing collapsing. Thirty eight (38) new employees were hired for this plant, with 31 of them being low-to-moderate income. This plant and the C-E Minerals facilities in Andersonville are owned by the Imerys Company of Paris, France, one of the leading manufacturers and suppliers of industrial minerals. Macon County was also awarded a $200,000 grant from the Georgia Department of Transportation for the construction of a turning lane on Highway 49 in front of the plant due to the increased amount of truck traffic going into the enlarged Imerys facility. The County has also applied for a OneGeorgia Equity grant to help with the construction of the rail spur.

From the Executive Director’s Desk...

On March 27, 2013 the River Valley Regional Council adopted a resolution in memory and honor of one of our most esteemed members, Andrea Brooks. Ms. Brooks was a true friend and staunch supporter of the Regional Commission. Her warm smile and encouraging words provided inspiration to me personally and to our staff. She was a woman of integrity and respect and demonstrated leadership in all of her accomplishments. Ms. Brooks always had Sumter County, Americus, and the River Valley Region at heart. She worked tirelessly to improve the economic conditions and quality of life in our region. I will miss her greatly in the coming months and years, and feel it was an honor to know her and work beside her.

-Patti
City of Richland Receives over $400,000 for Downtown Redevelopment

It was not an April Fools Day joke when the City of Richland received notification on April 1st they had received $432,133 from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs to rehabilitate 8 downtown buildings. This project will rehabilitate an entire block of downtown Richland, shown in the rendering above, and continue the rejuvenation started with Richland Rum. Two jobs will be created as part of this project and $173,990 will be invested by building owners, the Downtown Development Authority of Richland, and the Richland Better Hometown. Congratulations to the City of Richland!

RVRC Staff Submit 14 CDBG Applications

On April 2, 2013, RVRC Planning and Community Development Staff submitted 14 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) applications to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). Award announcements will be made in September of this year. The following applications were submitted:

- City of Butler—Sewer Improvements ($500,000)
- City of Cuthbert—Housing Rehabilitation ($500,000)
- City of Cordele—Sewer ($500,000)
- Unified Government of Cusseta-Chattahoochee County—Water Improvements, Streets & Drainage ($500,000)
- City of Fort Gaines—Sewer Improvements ($500,000)
- City of Ideal—Water Improvements ($250,000)
- Marion County—Streets & Drainage ($500,000)
- City of Marshallville—Wastewater Treatment ($500,000)
- Unified Government of Georgetown-Quintman County—Streets & Drainage ($500,000)
- Randolph County—Expansion to Ag/Ed Building ($500,000)
- City of Richland—Sewer Improvements ($500,000)
- City of Reynolds—Water & Sewer Improvements ($500,000)
- Talbot County—Streets & Drainage, Housing Rehabilitation ($661,175)
- City of Vienna—Sewer Improvements ($420,897)

Staff Spotlight

Bill Weathers

Bill is the newest addition to the Area Agency on Aging staff. He currently works in the Gateway department as an Intake and Referral Specialist where he screens clients for eligible services. Bill graduated from Columbus State University with an undergraduate degree in Health Science and a master’s degree in Public Administration with a concentration in Health Service. Bill is looking forward to learning everything the AAA has to offer its clients, and getting to know everyone here.

Grace Grant

Grace Grant is the Executive Secretary for the Americus Office. She has worked for the APDC/RDC/Regional Council for 35 years and has seen many transitions during this time. Grace performs various clerical duties including preparations of reports and assisting in the financial department. She and her husband Mitch enjoys spending time with their children and grandchildren, traveling, and riding their motorcycle.

Middle Flint Council on Aging Senior Picnic

The Middle Flint Council on Aging will be hosting their Annual Senior Picnic on:

Tuesday, May 14, 2013 from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

The picnic will be held at:
140 GA Hwy 27 East; Americus, Georgia
T-Shirts for the event are $7 in advance and $10 the day of the picnic.
To RSVP, please call 229.928.2126.
Association of County Commissioners Recognize Pataula Transit for Innovative Efforts

The crippling poverty long plaguing Southwest Georgia has been carefully documented; high unemployment, widespread obesity and diabetes, a regional leader in dropout rates and teen pregnancy, substandard housing and declining populations all combine to create one of the nation’s poorest areas. This is a region where not only is home ownership often a distant dream, but so is vehicle ownership, and before summer 2012 public transportation was an alien concept. People were grounded unless they could hitch a ride with a neighbor. “Most of them just didn’t have a car, and the only public transportation in such a rural area was over on the coastal area,” says Tina Rust, RVRC Planner. The RVRC is currently handling the administrative duties of a long-awaited public transportation initiative called the Pataula Regional Transit System, begun in July of 2012 after three counties, Quitman, Randolph and Stewart, came together to provide their 16,290 citizens with rides to jobs, clinics and shopping, and for neighborly visits. Pataula Transit seemed a natural conclusion after Richard Morris, chairman of the Georgetown-Quitman County Consolidated Government, was joined by Randolph County Commission Chairman Jimmy Bradley and Stewart County Commission Chairman Joe Williams in broadening the transit services of Quitman County’s in-county-only public transportation program. Now riders can pay a small flat fee for trips anywhere in the region, says Rust. “This gives them a means of getting to work or to a technical school, or for healthcare appointments,” Rust adds. With 18 percent of the three-county area population over the age of 65, another 17 percent without any reliable sources of transportation and 30 percent living in poverty, the Pataula Transit System seems like an incredible gift of government to the people it serves. The system is managed by the Lower Chattahoochee Regional Transportation Authority, which is composed of members from each of the participating counties. For their cooperative and innovative effort in meeting a critical need in their communities and for the ease of duplication in other communities, the commissions of Georgetown-Quitman, Randolph and Stewart counties have received the Georgia County Excellence Award for Infrastructure Development in Transportation.

Older American’s Month: Unleash the Power of Age

May is Older Americans Month, a perfect opportunity to show our appreciation for the older adults in our community. Since 1963, communities across the nation have joined in the annual commemoration of Older Americans Month—a proud tradition that shows our nation’s commitment to celebrating the contributions and achievements of older Americans. The theme for Older Americans Month 2013—Unleash the Power of Age—puts a spotlight on the important role older adults play in sharing their experience, wisdom, and understanding, and passing on that knowledge to other generations in a variety of significant ways. This year’s celebrations will recognize the value that older adults continue to bring to our communities through spirited participation in social and faith groups, service organizations, and other activities. While the Area Agency on Aging provides services, support, and resources to older Americans year-round, Older Americans Month is a great opportunity to show special appreciation for some of our most beloved citizens. We have many reasons to celebrate them! The Area Agency on Aging is joining in the national celebration of Older Americans Month 2013 with our annual Wellness Fair to promote intergenerational engagement and recreation. We invite you to join in the fun! This event will take place on Thursday, May 9, 2013 at Peachtree Mall from 8:00-10:00 AM. The Wellness Fair focuses on services for seniors to include but not limited to: FREE health screenings, education and products, and information on services for older Americans. The AAA will also be participating in the Middle Flint Council on Aging Senior Picnic that will be held on Tuesday, May 14, 2013.
City of Ideal Awarded ITAD Grant

The City of Ideal received an Immediate Threat and Danger Community Development Block Grant from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs in February when two lift stations in the city’s sewer system failed after 25 years of almost continuous use. The two lift stations are an important part of the city’s wastewater system and the loss of both could have caused major sewage problems in Ideal. River Valley Regional Commission Community Developer Buddy Strength presented the ceremonial check to Ideal Mayor Kathy Gordon (pictured left). The grant pays half the expenses of emergency situations such as what occurred in Ideal. The City of Ideal is also currently rehabilitating part of the city’s water system with a Community Development Block Grant.

A Matter of Balance

Did you know that falling is NOT a natural part of aging and can be avoided by assessing your risk factors and making changes to your environment? A Matter of Balance is an evidenced based program that has been proven to work to reduce the fear of falling and increase activity levels among older adults who manifest this concern. Last month, Ilona Preattle and Tiffany Ingram completed training to become Master Trainers for this program. They can teach others to become trainers as well teach community classes. If you are interested in in learning about this program or attending any upcoming sessions, please contact the Aging Department at 1-800-615-4379.

Columbus Parks & Rec Programs Receive Top Honors

The National Association of Counties (NACo) has selected two Columbus Parks and Recreation programs for Achievement Awards. The NACo’s annual Achievement Awards recognize innovative county government programs and are judged on intergovernmental cooperation, increasing citizen participation and awareness, improved cost effectiveness of county programs, improved public policy making, and other such criteria. “The Princess Within”, one of the programs selected for this award, is a summer camp focused on empowering and motivating young girls with common issues such as self-esteem, bullying, and peer pressure. The other program chosen for the award was “Empty Bowl”, a grassroots effort adopted and implemented in Columbus to fight hunger in the city. These programs were also recognized by the Georgia Association of County Commissioners’ 8th Annual Georgia County Excellence Awards Congratulations to Parks & Recreation and these outstanding programs!

RVRC Hosts Successful Planning & Zoning Training

The RVRC Planning staff held a land development zoning training on April 18, 2013 at South Georgia Technical College in Americus. Fifty-five (55) people attended the sessions presented by Frank Jenkins of Jenkins and Bowen P.C., Attorneys at Law. Mr. Jenkins discussed various topics to include Constitutional Claims: Vested Rights and Non-Conforming Uses; Legislative and Administrative Hearings and Procedures; and Preparing for and Dealing with Potentially Obnoxious Land Users. Rick Morris, Planning Director from the Columbus Office, also presented a short update on the new Comprehensive Planning Regulations passed by the State Legislature. In all, 12 of the 16 counties in the River Valley Region were represented.
Protecting Regionally Important Resources

Working within the framework of the Georgia Planning Act, 24 resources in our region have been identified as warranting specific, proactive measures intended to protect them from potentially adverse impacts of future development. These resources, identified most recently in last quarter’s newsletter, were incorporated into the recently adopted Regional Plan as Areas Requiring Special Attention. Recommended local government policies and ordinances and developers’ best management practices (all referred to here for convenience as “development standards”) have been identified for each of these Areas, and the Planning Act requires local governments adopt/implement them, as applicable, within three years. RC staff is developing a matrix to help match Special Areas in each jurisdiction with the recommended “development standards”, and to help determine which of them are already being enforced through codes and/or land use regulations. This information will, in turn, reveal which additional “development standards” the jurisdiction may need to implement to comply with mandated planning requirements. This is important not only because it involves protecting significant resources, but implementation of appropriate “development standards” is linked to maintaining Qualified Local Government Status, i.e., eligibility for certain state grants, loans and permits. Once this determination is made, staff will assist our member governments work toward satisfying this planning requirement. Local government chief administrative officers should expect contact from RC staff on this issue through the summer.

Irrigation Motor Rebate Available to Georgia Farmers

The Georgia Agricultural Irrigation Motor (AIM) Rebate Program will provide farmers with a rebate to replace inefficient diesel irrigation engines with energy-efficient electric irrigation motors. The rebates will cover 25 percent of eligible project costs, with a $10,000 maximum rebate available. AIM’s goal is to help Georgia farmers become more energy-efficient, save money on fuel costs, and reduce emissions. The application period for the program will close April 30, 2013, at 5:00 p.m. Available funding is limited and rebates will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. For more information, please visit the GEFA website at www.gefa.org.
RVRC Receives NADO Excellence in Regional Transportation Awards

The National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) promotes programs and policies to strengthen local governments, communities and economies through regional cooperation, program delivery, and comprehensive strategies. The Excellence in Regional Transportation Awards showcase organizations for noteworthy projects and practices in rural and small metropolitan transportation planning, program delivery, and special initiatives. Award winners received national recognition at the 2013 National Rural Transportation Peer Learning Conference, April 24 – 26 in Greenville, South Carolina. The River Valley Regional Commission’s Mobility Management program and the Prison to Peanuts Bicycle Adventure received the 2013 Excellence in Regional Transportation Awards. The Mobility Management program has established, expanded, and improved transit services in the 16-county region. The Prison to Peanuts Bicycle Adventure used close to 60% of the newly designated state bicycle routes and incorporated local landmarks in order to promote the route and Sumter County, Georgia. According to NADO President John Leonard, Executive Director of the Southern Georgia Regional Commission in Valdosta, Georgia: “The Excellence in Regional Transportation Awards highlight the important results of programs and projects like the Prison to Peanuts Bicycle Adventure. Such initiatives are central to fostering quality of place and facilitating economic vitality in our nation’s communities by promoting effective transportation networks.” For more information about the award-winning projects, contact the River Valley Regional Commission at (706) 256-2910.

Former WIA Participant Named Deputy of the Year

WIA participant Tim Horton graduated in December 2010 from the South Georgia Technical College (SGTC) Law Enforcement Academy (LEA) program. Tim was recently recognized as the Lee County (Georgia) Deputy of the Year. Tim has been employed with the Lee County Sheriff’s office since his graduation from the LEA program. The South Georgia Technical College LEA program is an 18 week program that allows individuals to receive training in basic law enforcement or post certification training. The WIA program and South Georgia Technical College are very pleased to have one of our students recognized with this honor. WIA Director Janice West stated, “the SGTC LEA program has been one of our most successful programs of study for WIA participants. We are very fortunate to have the SGTC LEA program in our area.” The LEA program allows individuals to complete training in a short time period, enter employment quickly, and advance their career at a quick pace. Congratulations Tim! Thanks to all the law enforcement agencies who hire our WIA & SGTC LEA graduates.

River Valley Communities Learn About Camera Ready

Maggie Potter from the Georgia Department of Economic Development, and Laura Jennings from the LaGrange-Troup County Chamber of Commerce shared their expertise on April 10 with the Lunch and Learn group of the River Valley region. Downtown professionals and others gathered at the Back Porch Restaurant in Shellman (Randolph County) to learn the secrets of becoming Camera Ready. Maggie Potter gave information on the state’s Camera Ready program and how communities could take advantage of it to make a real economic impact. She also stressed how critical it is that each county post photos of ‘film worthy’ locations on the state’s library of film locations. Maggie gave hints and suggestions about what kind of photos are the most helpful to the location scouts when they are looking for places to film. Laura Jennings gave an insiders view on Camera Ready. As the Tourism Director for the Chamber of Commerce, she has handled most of the requests for locations in Troup County. She shared many humorous stories relating to odd requests by location scouts and property owners as well as explaining how to post pictures on the state’s website.
Bicycle Columbus Receives Georgia Bikes Seed Grant

The newly formed bicycle advocacy organization, Bicycle Columbus, received a $5,000 SEED Grant from Georgia Bikes to assist with their advocacy efforts in Columbus and its surrounding areas. Bicycle Columbus was one of three organizations to receive the award. In order to receive the award, board members were required to attend the Winning Campaigns Training hosted in Athens from April 4-6. RVRC staff serves as technical advisors to the board of directors in order to assist with the development of their goals and objectives, as well as developing bicycle programs that focus on education and encouragement. Stay tuned for more news and events from this new organization!

Development Authority Training Coming to Americus

The Carl Vinson Institute of Government (University of Georgia) is offering one-day development authority training sessions at convenient locations throughout the state during 2013. The training sessions are designed to meet the mandated training requirement for development authority board members. Participants will discuss their responsibilities as members of development authority boards and the role that development authorities serve within the local economic development process. Topics include legal issues, ethics, conflicts of interest, and open records and open meetings requirements. In addition, participants will learn the basics of financing development authority operations, incentives, deal-closing funds, and bonds. They will also address strategic planning in community development, project development and management, and emerging issues that affect development authorities. The next training in our region will be offered:

July 26th, 2013
South Georgia Technical College
(900 South Georgia Tech Parkway; Americus, GA 31709).
To register, please contact Rob Gordon at 706.542.8427 or by email at gordon@uga.edu.

REGISTRATION FEES:
$245 for development authority board members
$120 for elected officials

CDSMP Program Graduates First Set of Lay Leaders

The River Valley Area Agency on Aging recently completed teaching the first Lay Leader class for the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program (CDSMP). This 4-day training teaches interested participants CDSMP so that they can go out in the community to teach this material to others. Subjects covered include: 1) techniques to deal with problems such as frustration, fatigue, pain and isolation, 2) appropriate exercise for maintaining and improving strength, flexibility, and endurance, 3) appropriate use of medications, 4) communicating effectively with family, friends, and health professionals, 5) nutrition, 6) decision making, and, 7) how to evaluate new treatments. Each participant in the workshop receives a copy of the companion book, Living a Healthy Life With Chronic Conditions, 4th Edition, and an audio relaxation CD, Relaxation for Mind and Body. The course is taught by 2 Master Trainers, certified through Stanford University. Graduates of our first Lay Leader training include: Eileen Gilbert of Vienna GA Senior Center, Carolyn Suggs of Vienna GA Senior Center, Matthew Walker of Columbus State University, and Betty Bell Innovative Senior Solutions in Americus GA. If you would like to participate in this 6 week workshop, or learn more about upcoming classes or Lay Leader trainings, please contact Lauren Pfrogner, or Ilona Preatte at 706-256-2910.

All class participants receive a copy of Living a Healthy Life With Chronic Conditions, 4th Edition, and an audio relaxation CD, Relaxation for Mind and Body.
Coming Soon to a Town Near You!

**BICYCLE ADVENTURE**

Back again for a second year is the Prison to Peanuts Bike Adventure!

**Saturday, April 27th 2012**

Riders depart from Andersonville at 9:00 AM
32 Mile Option: $15 | 64 Mile Option: $20

**FREE T-SHIRT FOR THE FIRST 100 REGISTRANTS!**

To register: www.activevalley.org/prisontopeanuts OR contact Kayra Velez at 706.256.2921 or kvelez@rivervalleyrc.org

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**Spring MidTown Bike Around**

Columbus, GA

**Saturday, April 28th 2013**

To register, please contact Ann Miller at 706.494.1664

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**BIKE TO WORK DAY MAY 17 2013**

Make sure to ride your bike to work on **Friday, May 17th**!

Energizing stations with morning refreshments will be open in **Columbus and Americus from 6:30 AM to 9:00 AM.**

Other events include:

**Columbus:**

5:45 PM: Ride with Mayor Teresa Tomlinson

7:00 PM: Bike to Work Day Block Party (Live entertainment provided by various acts of the Cutbait Music Festival)

**Americus:**

12:00 PM: Pizza in the Park with Mayor Barry Blount (FREE Pizza lunch for those who ride their bike to Rylander Park)

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**RVRC**

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