GEORGIA FORWARD LAUNCHES YOUNG GAMECHANGERS PROGRAM

On November 16-17, GeorgiaForward launched its new Young GameChangers program, an ambitious effort to marshal the energy and ideas of young, innovative, big-thinkers to bring new solutions to problems facing Georgia. This year, the Young Gamechangers have been asked to explore what will make a successful rural city in the 21st century. The 2012-2013 class of Young Gamechangers is comprised of 25 young professionals from across Georgia. Five of these are from the River Valley Region: Ben Andrews, Justin Arnold, Nicole de Vries, Bardin Hooks, and Mandy Young. In November, they began a six-month effort to work with leaders in Americus and Sumter County to explore big ideas for the community’s 21st century success. They heard from State Senator George Hooks, Americus Mayor Barry Blount, Paul Radford of the Georgia Municipal Association, Sumter County Commission Chair Randy Howard, City of Americus’ Chief Administrative Officer Charlotte Cotton, and Dr. Peter Coclanis from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Over the next five months, the Young Gamechangers will collaborate on game-changing ideas to propose to local leaders, which will be presented in the Spring. The hope is that some of the ideas and initiatives proposed will be attractive to Americus and Sumter County and come to life soon afterward. Stay tuned for what the Young Gamechangers propose!

From the Executive Director’s Desk...

The RVRC staff is kicking the New Year off at a running pace with many activities and projects. Our Aging staff is busy getting ready for the Area Plan update, which is due March 1st. The Area Plan is the budget and management document for providing services to senior citizens in the 16-county region. The Regional Agenda, prepared by the Planning Department, was approved by the Department of Community Affairs in early December. Now it is up to the RVRC Council and local governments to implement the recommendations in the document. Planning Staff is also working on a Tourism Plan for the City of Andersonville and updating zoning regulations for several local governments. Transportation Plans and Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan updates are also in development for various local governments. In late January, our Economic Development staff will host luncheons in Americus and Columbus to promote a new partnership with the Middle GA RC to bring the SBA 504 program to the RVRC region and also promote the RVRC Revolving Loan Funds. The Workforce Investment Program staff continues their outstanding work in training and placing workers in jobs. The RVRC is focused on fostering regional strategies, partnerships, and solutions in order to improve our region and the quality of life for our residents. We look forward to working with all of you in 2013!!

-Patti
Annmarie Rivera is the new Data and Resource Specialist for AAA. As the Resource Specialist, she updates records in the Enhanced Services Program, daily. She also goes out into the community and networks with other facilities in gathering resources to add to the growing database. An “army brat”, Annmarie moved here from Denver in 2010 to finish her bachelor’s degree in Psychology from Columbus State University. In her free time, she enjoys traveling, spending time with her two children (Jakob, 10, and Abbey, 6) and baking.

Debbie Zwaga is the Secretary and Receptionist for the Columbus office and has held this position for 2 and a half years. She performs various clerical and administrative duties to include correspondence with local officials, preparation of reports, and several organizational duties. Before joining the RVRC staff, Debbie was a teacher’s aide for the Taylor County School System for 15 years. Debbie is very involved with her church, serving as the church secretary and a youth group leader. Walking, crocheting, and spending time with family are some of the things she enjoys in her spare time.

South Georgia Technical College (SGTC) recently inducted 18 new members into the National Technical Honor Society (NTHS), four of which were Workforce Investment Act (WIA) participants. In order to receive this honor, students must be nominated by an instructor, be a full-time student at SGTC, and have a minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.7. The student must also demonstrate leadership abilities and display a commendable attitude, good mentality, worthy character, credible achievement, and a desire to pursue a career in the field of his or her technical study. The four WIA participants inducted were Taylor Thomas (Aircraft Structural Technology), Tammie Landers (Practical Nursing), Crandall Lewis (Aircraft Structural Technology), and Katie Crook (Nursing; not pictured).

The College of Letters and Sciences from Columbus State University recently held their annual awards ceremony, where several faculty members were awarded top honors. Among these was Dr. Patrick McHenry who received the 2012 Faculty Service Award. This award recognizes one faculty member each year for his or her contributions to the educational, environmental, and economic well being of the community. McHenry teaches English and serves as the Associate Dean of the College of Letters and Sciences. In recent years, he has served as the Interim Chair of Art, Interim Chair of Math and Philosophy, and Acting Dean of the former College of Arts and Letters. He has been an advocate for pedestrian and bicycle friendly development in and around Columbus and serves on the Columbus/Phenix City Citizen Advisory Committee and on the RVRC Council. Another council member who was recently recognized was Dr. Carole Rutland, who has been named to the College of Letters and Sciences Leadership Council. The College of Letters and Sciences houses academic programs in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences, and the Leadership Council works closely with the dean of the college to create opportunities for students, to enhance connections between the college and the community, to strengthen alumni relations, and to recognize faculty of the college for outstanding research and teaching. Congratulations to Pat and Carole!
Marion County Business Assisted with RVRC RLF Funds

The River Valley Regional Commission assisted Baby’s Dream Furniture with a loan just a few weeks before Christmas. The business has been operating in Marion County for over 20 years and assembles baby cribs and coordinating pieces such as nightstands, dressers and chests. An innovator in the industry, Baby’s Dream Furniture was the original Convertible Crib Maker. The total project cost was $267,000 with the RVRC EDA RLF funding $200,000 and the balance being funded through cash injection by the borrower. The company will retain 50 jobs and create 2 new jobs. The RVRC has a number of RLF programs funded by several federal agencies and are seeking businesses needing expansion or startup assistance money within the sixteen county region. Businesses must be able to meet the lending requirements of our RLF programs. Some of the main requirements are the retention or creation of jobs and, of course, good credit worthiness, collateral availability, and good character. RLF loans range from $35,000 to $200,000 per borrower. Borrowers are also encouraged to obtain participation by local private lending institutions. Further details and a blank application are available on the RVRC website http://www.rivervalleyrc.org/RevolvingLoanFund.htm and may be printed out. For more information contact Sarah Walls at swalls@rivervalleyrc.org or Katie Howard at khoward@rivervalleyrc.org or call 706-256-2910.

Columbus Bike/Ped Officers: Best in the State!

In 2009, the Columbus Police Department received recognition for having the best Bicycle/Pedestrian Safety Officers in the state. This year, they were once again recognized for the same honor. Some of the factors that helped the Columbus PD win this award are their selective traffic enforcement campaigns, educational programs, and advocacy efforts for safety. The award was presented at the annual 2011-2012 Governor’s Challenge, which was held on Friday, November 9th, 2012 at the Macon Coliseum Annex. This annual event is sponsored by the Governor’s Office of Highway Safety, which recognizes the dedication and participation of the departments that support the goals and objectives of the GOHS. The Columbus Police Department has participated in the Governor’s Challenge for the past three years.

FREE Health Expo

Over 25 different types of FREE Health Screenings!

Come early to make sure you get the tests you want!

Saturday, January 26th
9:00 AM—2:00 PM
Columbus Trade Center
The first annual Presidents and Patriots Park-to-Park Bike Adventure took place on Veteran’s Day Weekend (November 9-November 11). The 3 day, 2 night bike adventure began at Florence Marina State Park in Omaha, Georgia. From there, riders traveled to Lumpkin, Richland, Preston, and ended up in Plains, where riders then hopped on the Sam Shortline to Cordele (which was the last stop for the day). After spending the night at Georgia Veterans’ Memorial Park, riders departed Cordele and traveled through Crisp and Sumter counties towards Andersonville. Once in Andersonville, participants were able to tour the Andersonville National Historic Site and enjoy a tasty lunch. From there, riders traveled through Americus and ended back up in Plains at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site, where the ride ended. The ride would not have been made possible without the partnerships of the River Valley Regional Commission, National Park Service, the Department of the Interior, Georgia Department of Transportation, the Sam Shortline, and the state park rangers. The planning committee for this event is looking forward to planning next year’s ride!

Clay County CDBG Nearing Completion

The Clay County CDBG project for fiscal year 2011 is nearing completion. This project was the expansion of the Clay County water system to serve low to moderate income residents in the northern part of the County. Of the 106 residents, 92 (87%) had low to moderate incomes. These residents would no longer have the burden of maintaining wells and also having dependable access to clean drinking water. The major construction for the project was completed in a very prompt manner by the selected contractor at the end of November. The project is all but completed with only hook-ups from the water lines to the homes remaining. This project has brought not only safe and reliable drinking water to these 106 residents, but also greatly increased fire protection.

Understanding Georgia’s Risk to Natural Hazards

GIS staff attended the first in a 3-part series of workshops to update the 2013 Georgia State Hazard Mitigation Plan. The intent of these workshops is to bring together a broad group of stakeholders across the state to assist GEMA in updating the plan. The outcome of these workshops will determine how the risk of certain disasters will be handled at the state level, which will then determine risk management practices for local communities. Various hands-on group activities assist the planners in ranking the risk of 12 natural hazards based on both the event itself (historical frequency, duration, area impacted), and the vulnerabilities it can cause (economic impact, loss of life, other natural hazards such as drought ultimately leading to flooding). The hazards were ranked only according to the events themselves (historical frequency, duration, area impacted), and not considering the vulnerabilities they may cause. Based on these criteria, the initial ranking put drought, severe weather, and tornadoes at the top with greatest threat to the state, and earthquakes, dam failure, and sink holes at the bottom with the least threat. During the next workshop, these hazards will be reassessed considering the vulnerabilities to the state that each hazard may cause. During discussion, participants suggested the addition of natural hazards such as extreme heat and landslides, and consideration of the possible effects of global warming and sea level rise on Georgia. The next workshop will tentatively be held on February 6, 2013 at GEMA headquarters in Atlanta.
Need a Website for your Business?

Google is making it easy for Georgia businesses to get online. Their website (www.georgiagetonline.com) offers a free, easy to build Intuit website, a free customized domain name, free web hosting for a year, and online tools/training as well as how-to guides, worksheets, and tips on how to promote your business online. You’ll learn:

1. Why your business needs a website
2. How to create your website and make it look appealing
3. How your website is found on Google
4. How to connect with local customers online
5. How to build a community of loyal fans
6. How to serve on-the-go customers via mobile phones
7. How to understand what works through measurement (Google Analytics).

Ninety-seven percent of consumers look online for local products and services. Wait no longer! Go to www.georgiagetonline.com and learn how to grow your business and thrive online.

-Written by Georgia SBDC Network

WIA Participant Spotlight

Darrius Grier, a WIA participant in the Youth GED Plus program with Paxen Learning, is developing sound job skills, good work habits, and learning the importance of a positive attitude in the workplace. Darrius earned his GED in September 2012 and began the Work Experience activity at the DHR Division of Rehabilitation Services office in Americus. He was placed in a “non-traditional” employment opportunity working as a clerical assistant, where his job duties include answering telephones, filing, copying, working the front office, and various other tasks. The Americus office of the DHR Division of Rehabilitation has served as a Work Experience worksite for several youth participants. Gwenn Lynch (DHR staff) serves as the worksite supervisor and helps assist the youth in developing valuable job skills. Sheila Hines, Program Manager for Paxen Learning, states that DHR Division of Rehabilitation Services has been a great worksite for the youth. Several participants have been placed at this worksite and they have expressed that they really enjoyed the experience and have learned some valuable job skills and traits that will help them in their next job opportunity. A special thanks goes to Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services for serving as a worksite and helping youth gain job skills and positive work habits. Businesses interested in becoming a Work Experience worksite can contact Brandy Whaley or Sheila Hines at Paxen Learning, 229-931-8990, for more information.

GIS Staff Successfully Completes Arabi Water Valve Locating

In December 2012, the RVRC GIS staff completed the collection of GPS data of water valves in the City of Arabi. Currently, 69 valves have been identified and the data was merged with that of 38 previously collected fire hydrants. The GIS staff used as-built drawings to create maps showing the water system in the city. The city’s utility personnel will review and verify the provided maps. The final product be a map book of the data collected that will include map enlargements at a scale, specified by the City of Arabi, showing the physical location of the components recorded and representation of water line locations relative to road centerline data. Having this information is important because if a water line faltered, the valves can then be located in order to get turned off. The RVRC recently purchased a Trimble GeoXT GPS unit which can be used for GPS data collection. If your city or county needs to acquire an accurate location of any features, please contact Tina Rust or Mariyana Kostova at 1-877-819-6348.
Tour de Farm: An Agro-tourism Bike Tour

Tour de Farm, an Agro-Tourism Bike Adventure sponsored by Café Campesino in Americus, was held the first weekend in November (November 2-4). The bike ride served as a fundraiser for Georgia Organics and also as an awareness tool for local agriculture and farmers in Sumter County. The ride began with a “Meat & Greet” on November 2 at a local blueberry farm where participants got to mingle and eat some local, farm-raised beef, greens, and other produce. After camping out at the farm, riders awoke early on November 3 to get riding! Over the course of 50 miles and two days, riders were able to visit 5 local farms in Sumter County and taste local cuisine grown at each farm. The ride, which had about 75 riders would not have been possible without the partnership of the River Valley Regional Commission, Sumter Cycling, Georgia Organics, and all of the farms that hosted participants.

The Hispanic Community Gets a Helping Hand!

AAA Staff Annmarie Rivera, Shameika Averett, and Alysa Stephens with other Health Fair Staff

CALL 229.732.2291 FOR A RIDE!
SERVICES ARE CURB-TO-CURB!
Call between 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM, Monday through Friday, the day before you want a trip. We encourage you to call as early as possible (up to one week in advance) to schedule a trip.

AVAILABILITY IS FIRST COME, FIRST SERVED!

Best Time to Ride:
Off-peak hours are the best times to ride. Try to schedule appointments during the following times to increase your chance of seat availability:

Monday—Friday
10:00 AM to 2:00 PM
6:00 PM to 8:00 PM

For more information, please contact
Jarrod McCarthy, Mobility Manager, at 877-819-6348 OR 706-660-5371

Locally grown cuisine featured during Tour de Farm’s Meat & Greet

AAA Staff Annmarie Rivera, Shameika Averett, and Alysa Stephens with other Health Fair Staff

Tour de Farm: An Agro-tourism Bike Tour

November 3 to get riding!
RVRC Staff to Facilitate Zoning Training

The RVRC Planning staff will facilitate a land development zoning training in April, 2013. While all citizens are invited to attend, this workshop is primarily for planning/zoning commission members, zoning administrators and local elected officials. Topics to be covered include: A General Overview of Zoning Law, Georgia Subdivision Law, a Review of Other Land Development Ordinances, Regulating Care Facilities, Soil/Erosion and Sedimentation Control Practices, and Protecting Cultural Resources and Environmentally Sensitive Areas. To prepare for this session, Planning staff will conduct a survey of local governments with Zoning Ordinances in the River Valley Region to identify additional topics or areas of specific concern. Please encourage your Planning/Zoning Staff and Planning Commission Members to respond to the survey by February 1, 2013. For further information contact Rick Morris or Allison Slocum by calling our office at 1-877-819-6348.

Regionally Important Resources: Areas Requiring Special Attention

The most recent edition of the newsletter provided some background for the identification of 24 regionally important resources which were the focus of the Regional Resource Plan adopted by the RC board in November, 2011. The Regional Plan, adopted on January 23, 2013, addresses these resources as “Areas Requiring Special Attention”. Georgia’s legally-mandated planning standards require local governments to adopt and implement policies and protection measures, and enforce development best management practices that protect these resources from potentially adverse impacts of development occurring within one mile of the resource. Our cities and counties are required to have these policies and practices in place by January, 2016. Within the River Valley Region the size of the development that triggers RIR review is linked to the same thresholds that trigger review of developments of regional impact (DRI). Staff will work with our member governments to identify and assist with establishment of any necessary regulatory and review procedures related to RIR. In the meanwhile, do not hesitate to call members of our planning staff with any questions.

Alzheimer’s Association Experiences Great Success at Annual Walk

The Columbus, Georgia Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association hosted their Annual “Walk to End Alzheimer’s” in Uptown Columbus. The walk was attended by over 1,500 friends and family who have been touched by this devastating disease. Alzheimer’s is a type of dementia that causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior. Symptoms usually develop slowly and get worse over time, becoming severe enough to interfere with daily tasks. The Columbus Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association raised over $78,000 for research and to raise awareness of Alzheimer’s and related dementias!
Quarterly Lunch & Learn: February 1

February 1st, 2013
11:00 AM to 1:00 PM
Whitewater Barbeque
1269 Americus Highway (Highway 19 South – 5 minutes from Butler, GA)
Bring $10 for lunch (sponsored by Whitewater Barbeque)

Communication: How to Get the Word Out

At this Lunch & Learn, we’ll be discussing ways on “getting the word out” about your program or business. Kayra Velez from the RVRC will host an interactive, beginners session on Constant Contact, which is a powerful tool used to get digital messages out at free or low cost. Participants are encouraged to share their own experiences on getting the word out. Bring a laptop equipped with wireless internet, ten (10) contacts (either in Outlook, excel or word), and a logo, or a picture and she will teach you how to use Constant Contact to start a digital marketing campaign. Also, please bring an extension cord to plug in your laptop. If you want to bring a tablet, we will try to work with that as well. Jo Childers from DCA, and a former Downtown Mainstreet Manager, will then lead a discussion on ideas of ways to communicate with your leadership and community. Please bring examples of ways you communicate to share with the group (newsletters, newspaper articles, e-mails/e-blasts, etc). Communication is the name of the game, so attend this event and learn more about attracting customers/clients/participants! RSVP to Katie Howard by January 28th by calling 1-877-819-6348 or emailing khoward@rivervalleyrc.org.