GOVERNOR DEAL
SIGNS INLAND PORT AGREEMENT

Governor Nathan Deal, center, along with Georgia Ports Authority Executive Director Curtis Foltz, left and Cordele Intermodal Services President Jonathan Laufer, right, sign a new Memorandum of Understanding during an event, Wednesday, July 10, 2013, at the Cordele Intermodal Services in Cordele, Ga. The new inland port agreement will create and expand international markets for regional businesses. The agreement will provide a 200 mile rail route between the authority’s terminal in Savannah to southwest Georgia, Florida and Alabama. The Ports Authority officials say the deal will also expand markets for regional businesses. The inland port is expected to make Savannah a better option for customers in the region by lowering the cost to access the port’s array of shipping lines, services and destinations, officials said. The agreement will also provide customers with access to 38 weekly shipping services. The agreement will help expedite shipping because truckers will no longer have to make round-trip deliveries from Cordele to Savannah or Brunswick, state Representative Buddy Harden said. The agreement will efficiently connect businesses throughout the region, and is part of a broader effort to support economic growth, Governor Deal stated. He also added that the Georgia Ports Authority supports more than 352,000 jobs throughout the state, and is one of Georgia's largest job creators. Officials say the state’s ports also contribute $18.5 billion in income, and nearly $57 billion in revenue to the state’s economy. The ports also provide the local economy with about $2.5 billion in tax revenue.

From the Executive Director’s Desk...

As we wind down one fiscal year and get ready to start up another, I wanted to highlight some of the major accomplishments in our region for FY13. First and foremost, the River Valley Region was one of three regions in the state to pass the Transportation Improvement Act of 2010. This is expected to generate approximately $594,061,269.00 in new monies for transportation projects over a ten year period. Already, many of our local governments are putting their 25% discretionary money to good work by improving the road conditions in their communities. GeorgiaForward launched the Young GameChangers program in Americus-Sumter County. The program uses young, talented Georgians to help solve some of our communities’ most pressing challenges. Amir Farokhi, Executive Director, GeorgiaForward, presented many of the ideas from this group at our May Council meeting. These ideas can be used throughout the region to initiate new solutions for age old problems. The Regional Plan was adopted by the Council in January of this year which provides a road map for the region. The Plan pays special attention to 24 regionally important resources in the region in terms of their protection. These resources are “Areas Requiring Special Attention”. Local governments are required to adopt and implement policies and protection measures that protect the resources from potential adverse impacts of development within a one mile radius of the resource. Staff will be working with our local governments over the next few years to develop best management practices for these significant resources.
Butler Takes Next Step

Citizens of Butler took the next step towards the completion of their Urban Redevelopment Plan on June 20, 2013. Local residents were engaged to determine their opinions and any issues concerning downtown and the target area which includes the corridor leading from downtown to Highway 96. This information gathering session, otherwise known as a charrette, was held at the Southern Crescent Technical College facility in Butler. Some of the issues identified included buildings which need to be rehabilitated or demolished as well as buildings which were in good condition. Attendees also acknowledged the great things about the area such as Barrows Gun Store which attracts people from throughout the State and even the Southeast and the historic buildings in the downtown. The ideal location of Butler on two major highways was also discussed as an important asset for the community. Signage was brought up as a tool to bring travelers off of Highway 96 and into the town. All of the items were identified on maps of the target area which will be consolidated into one map allowing residents a pictorial view of assets and liabilities in the area.

A Matter of Balance in Dooly County

Eleven seniors are participating in the first class for an evidenced based program called A Matter of Balance. This eight week, two hour class meets in the Dooly County Senior Center and addresses physical and emotional aspects of falling. It combines exercise and addresses personal fears in overcoming anxieties by cognitive restructuring. The activity level of our participants varies from being very active and mobile to walking with assistive devices. The classes have been great thus far; the seniors have exchanged great dialog amongst themselves and have had a lot of fun. Members of the community are not only able to attend classes, but they can also become certified to teach classes. If you are interested in becoming a trainer for this class, please contact Ilona Preatt, Area Agency on Aging Program Director, at 706-256-2910 or iпreattle@rivervalleyrcaaа.org.

Staff Spotlight

Cassie Myers
Cassie is the newest addition to the Planning Department in the Columbus Office. She will be working as an Environmental Planner and also doing GIS work for the regional commission. Cassie received her Bachelor’s degree from the University of Alabama in Biology, and has recently received her Master’s in Environmental Science from Columbus State University. She has strong interests in freshwater ecology and insects. In her spare time, she enjoys painting, drawing, and spending time with her 3-year old dog, Mibes.

Regionally Important Resources

The 24 resources included in our Regional Resource Plan are not evenly distributed across our 16 counties. They are much less prevalent in the northern-most counties of Harris and Talbot. Cities in both counties typically have only one of the resources in their jurisdictions, while Stewart County is believed to have the largest number (7 to be exact). Consequently, the number of protective measures local governments will be expected to maintain/implement to protect these resources will vary; ranging from 10 to upwards of 60. RC staff has prepared a spreadsheet to facilitate local and regional staff use in identifying measures currently in use, and any that may be needed for better resource protection. The spreadsheet is part of a larger document for use identifying which local governance standards in the Regional Plan jurisdictions may need to implement to maintain state-issued qualified local government status. While the minimum standards number less than a dozen, the spreadsheet includes a longer list of standards which, once satisfied, would entitle jurisdictions for incentive funding planned by the state. Chief executive officers throughout the region were notified in June. RC staff will soon be contacting them to begin working through these spreadsheets which are customized for each jurisdiction.
Regional Bike to Work Day Events—
A Major Hit!

RVRC Bike/Ped staff experienced great success with the execution of the 2013 Bike to Work Day events. This year the event was held for the third time in the city of Americus, and the fifth time in the city of Columbus. The week was kicked off in Columbus with the help of Ride On Bikes and Bicycle Columbus as they hosted a group ride with a record-breaking 270 cyclists. On Wednesday, the Columbus Cycling Club and Bicycle Columbus sponsored the Ride of Silence, which is held annually to remember fallen cyclists. Forty-five (45) people were in attendance. Early Friday morning on National Bike to Work Day (May 17th) in Americus and Columbus, energizing stations were set up to greet riders as they made their morning commutes to work. Columbus Staff hosted three energizing stations, located at the Fall Line Trace (Rails to Trails) by Hannan Elementary, Lakebottom Park, and the Riverwalk by Oxbow Meadows. Americus Staff hosted one station on the front lawn of the Public Safety Building. All riders were greeted with snacks and water bottles to help them power through their morning commutes. The city of Columbus greeted over 100 riders during their morning commute, including RVRC Executive Director Patti Cullen, and Americus greeted 50. The fun continued in the afternoon with the 3rd Annual Ride with the Mayor in both Americus and Columbus, and a post-ride celebration in each city. Citizens in Americus were able to enjoy a free pizza lunch with Mayor Barry Blount, and Columbus participants were given free entrance to the Cutbait Music Festival. These successful events are a culmination of year-long planning done by each city’s Bicycle & Pedestrian Planning Advisory Committees, who all worked very hard to make the events a success in each city.

Flint River: Running Dry

The Flint River originates in the upper Piedmont area just south of Atlanta, flows through the Coastal Plain, and stretches all the way to the southwest corner of our state before meeting the Chattahoochee River at Lake Seminole. Along this 344 mile-long stretch, the Flint provides water for over one million people, ten thousand farms, as well as an abundance of unique animal and plant life. The river, one of only 40 left in the United States that flow unimpeded for over two hundred miles, has provided habitat for a variety of threatened and endangered species. Unfortunately, the Flint River might be in trouble. Despite draining 8,460 mi² of western Georgia, the Flint River has recently been experiencing dramatically reduced low flow levels. Over the past 30 years, low flow rates in the lower part of the river have decreased 40%, and over 70% in tributaries and its upper stretch. In its 2013 report, American Rivers names the Flint as the second most endangered river in the country; the Flint was also on the list in 2009 with the most significant threat being damming for drinking supply. This year, the troubles are attributed to “outdated water management” with over-permitting and over-pumping of the Floridian Aquifer being a main concern. Severe low flows have impacted the region significantly by lowering property values, reducing opportunities for recreation, and critically jeopardizing wildlife. For example, the river’s southernmost tributary, once home to three federally protected species, has been dry in nine of the past eleven years, including non-drought years. The problem we face today in the Flint, however, cannot be attributed to any single problem, but instead to a myriad of factors that have been at play for decades including increased urbanization, drought, and higher water demands. Restoration of healthy flow rates is possible but will require time, considerable changes in water withdrawal and return flow volumes, as well as a large degree of cooperation between policy-makers, scientists, and stakeholders in order to bring awareness and a greater understanding to the problems at hand and potential solutions for them.
RVRC Forms MLK Jr. Advisory Council

The River Valley Regional Commission has formed a Martin Luther King, Jr. Advisory Council and elected Jerry “Pops” Barnes of Columbus to be chairman. The state Council chairman, Senator Emanuel Jones, attended the regional council’s first meeting in Buena Vista May 22, congratulated the newly-appointed members and thanked them for responding to the challenge of supporting Dr. King’s legacy. Chairman Barnes said many young people view Dr. King as “history only, but his message is timeless and has great relevance to the problems our communities face today.” He said he hoped the River Valley group could work with the State Martin Luther King, Jr. Advisory Council to help inspire new generations of Americans to carry on Dr. King’s work. The River Valley Council elected Mike Spight of Crisp County as Vice Chair. Other members (pictured above) include Kevin Brown of Marion County, Charles Gibson, Mayor of Lumpkin, Randy Howard of Sumter County, Cicero Latimore of Taylor County, Eddie Daniels, Mayor of Vienna, Clay Jones of Sumter County, and youth members Demarquez Mallard, Clifton Holloman, and Shavon Harris all of Buena Vista. Also included in the photo is John Turner (far right) with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs/State MLK, JR., Advisory Council.

River Valley ADRC Receives Exceptional Service Award

The River Valley Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) received the Exceptional Service Award for the wide range of services that they provide to the disabled population, caregivers, and their families. The Mayor’s Committee for Persons with Disabilities presented the award to Shameika Averett and Annmarie Rivera, AAA Staff, who accepted the award on the ADRC’s behalf. The River Valley ADRC is the region’s “one-stop shop” for information and resources sought out by seniors, professionals, family members, and people with disabilities. The River Valley ADRC doesn’t identify itself as just a place, but rather a new way of providing information and assistance, awareness, and access. Some of the services offered include options counseling for long-term care, Enhanced Services Program (ESP) (a database with over 3000 resources in our 16-county region), Medicaid waiver programs, Medicare/Medicaid assistance, Money Follows the Person (nursing home transitions), eligibility screening and many more!

River Valley Hosts Historic Preservation Training

On June 14, 2013, Historic Preservation Staff Allison Slocum hosted a training session for Historic Preservation Commissions in our area. Monica Callahan, Planning Director for the City of Madison Georgia, was the guest speaker. Monica has a degree in Historic Preservation from The University of Georgia and is a facilitator for historic preservation training with the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions. She spoke on the Six P’s of Preservation: Public, Policy, Procedure, Practice, Politics and Perception. Representatives from the City of Americus, City of Columbus, City of Cordele, City of Montezuma and the City of Vienna attended the session.

Corral Trapping for Hogs

The Pennahatchee Creek hog harvesting project is underway. The RVRC is working to remove approximately 1,000 hogs within an eight square mile area in Dooly County. Along with establishing several additional Best Management Practices on cattle operations, the RVRC hopes to reduce the levels of fecal coliform in Pennahatchee Creek. So far, approximately 250 hogs have been removed within the past six months using a corral trapping technique. Once hogs are conditioned with an automatic feeder, a corral, thirty five feet in diameter with an eight foot opening, is built around the food source. Conditioning continues for about a week while the hogs are being watched remotely with a live camera. Once the entire hog family has been identified and is inside the enclosure, the gate is triggered remotely, and all of the hogs are captured. This operation will continue for one more year within this watershed.
What’s Up with Pataula Creek?

Counts of fecal coliform and sediment, that’s what! Efforts are underway to recover the Pataula Creek watershed to its natural state. Several creeks within the watershed are impaired with either high fecal coliform counts or high sediment levels. The River Valley Regional Commission has contracted with Georgia Environmental Protection Division to write a Watershed Improvement Plan for this area. RVRC staff has met with stakeholders to determine potential sources of these impairments. Stakeholders believe that the fecal coliform problem may derive from an abundant feral hog population, and the sediment issue may be from forestry operations coupled with loose soil and steep slopes. In order to determine problem areas, the RVRC will be taking water samples from ten locations within the watershed with efforts to establish a general location of the source of impairments. Sampling for e-coli, a good indicator of fecal coliform, and turbidity, a measurement of sediment intensity, will take place once per month for one year starting in July. As a result of the sediment impairment, several locations within the watershed have low macro-invertebrate counts, so monitoring for this will be conducted quarterly. Once problem areas are identified, a detailed plan on what best management practices (BMPs) need to be used and where to use them will be established. The plan is scheduled to be completed June of 2014. Funding to implement the Watershed Improvement Plan may then be sought through Section 319(h) of the Clean Water Act, which allocates local funds for implementation of BMPs for impaired streams.

Revolving Loan Fund

DON’T FORGET!
The RVRC has available funds to assist start-up and existing small business. For more information on how you can qualify, please contact:
Sarah Walls | swalls@rivervalleyrc.org
Katie Howard | khoward@rivervalleyrc.org

Dual Success for WIA Participant Corey Brown

Corey Brown is a double success story for the WIA program. He needed to obtain his General Education Diploma (GED) to move forward in life, so he enrolled with the Paxen Learning GED Plus training program to earn his GED. Corey worked hard and earned his GED in October 2012. After obtaining his GED, Corey wanted to continue his education. Paxen Learning staff referred Corey to South Georgia Technical College (SGTC) where he enrolled in the Law Enforcement Academy (LEA) program. This program prepares individuals for positions in the law enforcement area such as police officers, security officers, correctional officers, sheriff deputies, etc. Corey completed the LEA program and received his Peace Officers Standards Training (POST) certification in May 2013. Corey is currently seeking employment and has applied with several local area police departments. The WIA program was able to assist Corey in reaching two important goals: obtaining his GED and furthering his post-secondary education. This is an excellent example of community partners (Paxen Learning & SGTC) teaming up to meet the needs of our WIA participants. Thanks to the staff from SGTC WIA and Paxen Learning for making Corey a double success.

West Central Georgia Care-Net

The West Central Georgia Care-Net, held its quarterly meeting on June 25, 2013 at the River Valley Area Agency on Aging in Columbus. The West Central Georgia Care Net was developed in conjunction with The Rosalynn Carter Institute (RCI) in Americus to assist caregivers of all kinds through education, resource development, and advocacy. The meeting, attended by professional and family caregivers, included discussions centered on planning for the 2014 fiscal year. River Valley AAA, the liaison agency in partnership with the RCI, serves caregivers through its Caregiver Timeout, Powerful tools for Caregivers, and Kinship Programs, as well as a Telephone Reassurance program. Membership in Care-Net is open to all professional and family caregivers in region. For more information on the West Central Georgia Care Net or any of the River Valley AAA caregiver programs, contact Linda Harris, Care-Net Coordinator, at 706-256-2939, or by email @ lharris@rivervalleyrcaaa.org.
City of Pinehurst Receives $56,035

The City of Pinehurst received a Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEK) from USDA Rural Development for $56,035. This grant will be used to replace a deteriorating well house and to provide security and flood water protection for two pump stations in the wastewater system. The well house has holes in the walls and the ceiling which allow rain to enter the building and damage expensive water treatment equipment. A new fence will surround the well house and water tower for increased safety and security. This grant will also be used to build a wall surrounding a pump station to prevent flood waters from entering the wastewater system and damaging the water treatment equipment. Mayor Walter Blount and the City Council worked with two local companies to get this grant: Planters Warehouse/Griggs Gin Company and the Pinehurst Peanut and Grain Company. Both companies depend on the water system for fire protection, and to clean and disinfect their machinery and wagons to prevent contamination of their peanuts and grains.

Prison to Peanuts Reaches Second Year Success

On Saturday, April 27th, Bike/Ped Staff Members Julio Portillo and Catie McRae, in conjunction with Sumter Cycling Inc. and the National Park Service, hosted the second “Prison to Peanuts” Park-to-Park Bicycle Adventure. The 32-mile bike ride began in Andersonville at the Andersonville National Historic Site, continued through the city of Americus, and ended in downtown Plains near the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site. A 64-mile option was offered that allowed riders to make a loop back to the Andersonville starting point. Over 110 riders participated and several were already talking about attending next year’s event. After the ride was over, participants enjoyed free peanut butter ice cream in Plains and a hot dog lunch in Andersonville. The ride was put on to showcase some of the national parks that our region has to offer, in addition to highlighting a great bicycle route that recently received the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) state bicycle route designation. Plans are already underway for next year’s event, and staff hopes to make the event even bigger!

WIA Participants Attend GED Graduation Ceremony

South Georgia Technical College (SGTC) Adult Literacy sponsors a GED Graduation ceremony each year in June. This Graduation ceremony allows the individuals who have earned their GED to wear a cap and gown and walk across the stage to acknowledge the attainment of GED credential. This opportunity provides a sense of accomplishment and pride for the WIA participants, their families, and friends. GED Plus is an intensive basic skills remediation over the five subject areas of the State GED examination. Training, provided by Paxen Learning, is delivered for a six-week period, during which participants attend training five days per week for six and a half hours per day. Participants must successfully pass all five subject areas of the GED examination and meet the overall score requirement to earn the GED. In addition to GED remediation, participants also receive training in work-readiness and soft skills. Sixty (60) WIA participants were able to graduate this year. CONGRATULATIONS GED GRADUATES!

Top Five Ways to Support Georgia Grown

Agriculture is part of every life in Georgia. While all Georgians do not live on farms, agriculture affects each and every citizen of the state. It is a $70 billion industry providing Georgians with more than 380,000 jobs. Supporting our local agriculture industry can be a great boost to our economy as well as fun and healthy. Here are the top 5 ways your business can promote Georgia’s agriculture industry.

1. **Eat Georgia Grown** – Visit your favorite local restaurant with or ask your local grocer for their selection of Georgia Grown products.
2. **Buy Georgia Grown**- Locally grown products are available at a Georgia Farm Bureau Certified Farm Market near you.
3. **Visit Georgia Grown**- Have your next meeting or retreat on a Georgia farm. Several agritourism locations have packages made for office groups and meeting facilities.
4. **Wear Georgia Grown**- Remember to buy Georgia Grown if your business is looking for uniforms or promotional t-shirts.
5. **Sponsor Georgia Grown**- The Georgia Grown program is always looking for partners to help support Georgia’s farmers. If you are interested in implementing any of these ideas at your business or if you have any questions, please give us a call at 404-656-3680 or visit us at www.GeorgiaGrown.com.
CEDS Committee Learns About CCRPI

Matt Cardoza (pictured right), Director of Communications for the Georgia Department of Education, spoke at the Comprehensive Economic Development Committee meeting on June 26, 2013. He briefed the group on the new College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). This index was created as part of the waiver from the federal No Child Left Behind Act and is designed to help parents and the public know how schools are performing in a more comprehensive manner than the pass/fail system previously in place under Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The CCRPI is in effect in every school system in Georgia. Based on a 2012 survey of shareholders in the River Valley Region, education is one of the top challenges facing the region. Because of this, the CEDS Committee has decided to focus heavily on education and workforce development. To that end, the State School Superintendent, Dr. John Barge, will speak at the August 28th RVRC Council Meeting. All area school superintendents have been invited to attend the meeting in hopes that conversations will be started about ways that the CEDS Committee and the RVRC can assist local school systems to meet the ever increasing demands of the economy.

Georgia Academy for Economic Development Graduation

The Georgia Academy for Economic Development recently graduated 41 participants from the River Valley Region on May 29, 2013. These participants represented professional and non-professional economic development fields, including elected officials, public servants, business leaders, educators, and social service providers from our 16-county region. The Academy, held at South Georgia Technical College (SGTC) in Americus, provided each of the graduates an opportunity to gain a unique understanding of the complexities of economic and community development on local, regional, and state levels. In addition, the curriculum features specific leadership skills such as consensus building, ethics in public service, collaborative leadership and other segments needed for effective community leadership in economic development. Created in 1993 by the Governor’s Development Council and staffed by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the Academy assembles a cross section of economic development professionals and resources to provide this training in 12 service delivery regions in Georgia. Since its organization, the Academy has provided training for thousands of professional and non-professional economic developers around the state. As part of the final session in Region 8 Wally Summers, SGTC VP for Economic Development and RVRC council member, facilitated a Workforce Development Panel with Candace Head, Georgia Department of Labor Economic Development Coordinator for Region 8 and Norma English of the RVRC Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Program. Each shared information on various programs and assistance available to employers and job applicants. Scott Anderson, PetCareRX Site Manager in Americus, presented a very enlightening perspective of how local businesses and industry can use many of the economic development and workforce resources available to help existing and new businesses in our region. The next Region 8 Georgia Academy for Economic Development will begin in the spring of 2014. For more information about applications or nominations, please contact Jo Childers with DCA at (229) 924-3707 or by email at jo.childers@dca.ga.gov

RVRC Receives NADO Innovation Award

The River Valley Regional Commission has received an Innovation Award from the National Association of Development Organizations for the Vienna Urban Redevelopment Project. For more than 20 years, NADO’s Innovation Award has provided regional development organizations throughout the nation a unique opportunity to showcase their important work. The project allowed the staff of the RVRC to provide dedicated personnel to create a Redevelopment Plan for the City of Vienna which includes illustrative plans and a market analysis, and also allows the city to further strengthen its downtown redevelopment efforts. The RVRC worked with citizens in Vienna, who participated in Pattern and Place Charrette Workshops that were also recognized by NADO in 2011, to create a redevelopment plan tailored specifically to the City of Vienna in order to meet its current and future needs. By using principals and techniques studied during the first phase of the workshops, the citizens were familiar with charrette-style planning participation techniques. The finished product included a market analysis to evaluate and recommend appropriate businesses, redevelopment strategies, and an illustrative plan that will be used as an aid in future redevelopment efforts and in future grant applications.
Medicare Made Easy!

Medicare Made Easy presented by GeorgiaCares is a 3-hour workshop that will introduce the A, B, C and D’s of Medicare and discuss the impact of the Affordable Care Act on Medicare. This will be an interactive presentation that will focus on your understanding of Medicare as a beneficiary, caregiver, or a social service professional.

**River Valley Event:**
Thursday, August 29, 2013
9:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Columbus Library
3000 Macon Road
Columbus, GA 31906

**Audience:** Medicare beneficiaries, caregivers, social service professionals and anyone else interested in learning more about Medicare.

**Registration:** You can register for a Medicare Made Easy presented by GeorgiaCares event at: [www.medicaremadeeasy.eventbrite.com](http://www.medicaremadeeasy.eventbrite.com). RSVP is required. If you have any questions regarding Medicare Made Easy presented by GeorgiaCares, contact Shameika Averett at saverett@rivervalleyrcaa.org or 706.256.2910.

Beth English Named New GMA President

Beth English has been named the Georgia Municipal Association’s (GMA) new leader at the annual meeting in Savannah held in June. English was first elected to the Vienna City Council in 1998. She’s the third Vienna city official elected to serve as president of GMA in the organization’s history. GMA is a non-profit state association representing municipal governments in Georgia. She has served on the GMA Board of Directors since 2001, as well as several committees and task forces on GMA’s behalf. The RVRC is very proud to have Beth representing our region in such a distinguished position. Congratulations Beth!

Delivering Our Region’s Progress