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in the Region  
June 2018**

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***RIVER VALLEY REGIONAL COMMISSION'S  
NINTH ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE LUNCHEON***

River Valley Regional Commission hosted its *Ninth Annual Legislative Luncheon* in **Buena Vista, Georgia** on May 23rd. The following legislators attended the luncheon and updated the RVRC Council and guests:

- Representative Debbie Buckner, Georgia, District 137
- Representative Bill McGowan, Georgia, District 138
- Representative Buddy Harden, Georgia, District 148
- Representative Gerald Greene, Georgia, District 151
- Senator Freddie Powell Sims, Georgia, District 12
- Senator Ed Harbison, Georgia, District 15
- Field Representative Bret Smith (for US Congressman Drew Ferguson)
- Field Representative Laura Gower (for US Senator Johnny Isakson)
- Field Representative Elaine Gillispie (for US Congressman Sanford Bishop)
- Director Kenneth Cutts (for US Congressman Sanford Bishop)

Commissioner Lynne Riley, Georgia Department of Revenue, also gave an update on taxes collected, income tax credits available, tax reform, and other services offered thru the Department of Revenue.



Rep. Debbie Buckner    Rep. Bill McGowan    Rep. Buddy Harden    Rep. Gerald Greene    Sen. Freddie Powell Sims    Sen. Ed Harbison



Rep. Gerald Green;  
Patti Cullen, RVRC  
Executive Director

***EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PATTI CULLEN  
RECOGNIZED BY THE  
GEORGIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY***

At the Legislative Luncheon Patti Cullen, River Valley Regional Commission Executive Director, was presented with a **Resolution of Recognition** by State Representative Gerald Greene. This Resolution was adopted by the 2018 Georgia General Assembly to recognize the efforts of Patti Cullen to improve the quality of life for citizens in the River Valley Region during her over 35 years of work in community and economic development.

## ***FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK...***

In April of this year, I had the honor to attend the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia's Annual Conference in Savannah. The trailer for the conference was "It's about **PEOPLE** coming together from great **PLACES** across the state to share **PERSPECTIVES** about issues facing their communities." I can honestly say I had never been so proud of the River Valley region and the **PEOPLE** we have in leadership roles across the state. On Sunday afternoon, Harry Lange, Chair of the **Harris County** Commission, was sworn in as President of ACCG; Randy Howard, Chair of the **Sumter County** Commission, as the 8<sup>th</sup> District Board member; Carvel Lewis, Chair of the **Georgetown-Quitman County** Commission, represents Consolidated Governments for ACCG; and Terrell Hudson, Chair of **Dooly County** Commission, to ACCG's Board of Managers. All of these men serve on the River Valley Regional Commission Council and are true servant leaders. They each come from different **PLACES** and have different **PERSPECTIVES** on numerous issues, but they believe in working together for the betterment of their community, region, and state. I am truly honored and fortunate to be able to work side-by-side with them. Patti

## ***CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT FOR EXCELLENCE IN FINANCIAL REPORTING***

The Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting has been awarded to **River Valley Regional Commission** by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) for its Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR). The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management.

The RVRC has been judged by an impartial panel to meet the high standards of the program, which includes demonstrating a constructive "spirit of full disclosure" to clearly communicate its financial story and motivate potential users and user groups to read the CAFR. The Government Finance Officers Association is a major professional association servicing the needs of nearly 19,000 appointed and elected local, state, and provincial-level government officials and other finance practitioners.



Patti Cullen, Executive Director and Emily Chambers, Finance Officer



## **EMPIRE THEATRE, LLC**

The River Valley Regional Commission Loan Committee at its meeting in April, approved a loan for Empire Theatre, LLC through its revolving loan fund which was provided by USDA, Rural Development to the RVRC. The loan is being made in participation with South Georgia Banking Company of Cordele/Ashburn. Empire Theatre, LLC, also known as the Empire Dance and Performing Arts Studio, has been in operation for approximately three years in a leased building. The bank and RVRC funds will be used to purchase and renovate a 7,000 square foot building, located at 119 W 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue, **Cordele**, Georgia. This studio has produced over seven (7) professional children's theatre shows including "Jungle Book", "Wizard of Oz", "Annie", "Beauty and the Beast", and "Toy Story" just to name a few. In addition, they hold workshops and agent showcases. The Empire Theatre was honored to have been picked as the Small Business of the Year for 2017 in **Cordele/Crisp County** and is excited to be able to continue to provide more community synergy through the performing arts in the years to come. The River Valley Regional Commission is very excited to be able to participate, along with South Georgia Banking Company, in this project.

## WIOA PARTICIPANT FINDS CAREER WORKING IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

Maqueisha Smith was a single parent with limited income resources to help her support her family. She heard about the WIOA Eckerd Connects Paxen Career Pathways and Work Experience (WEX) training services. Maqueisha had a limited work history. She previously worked in fast food and the hotel industry making minimum wage. Working with her Career Coach, she found out that she had an interest in law enforcement. The Career Coach was able to develop a training plan for the Work Experience (WEX) opportunity with the **Sumter County Sheriff's Department** for Maqueisha.

The WEX training plan outlines the job duties to be learned and goals for successful mastering of duties and skills. Training evaluations are completed throughout the training. The WEX training activity generally last from 6 – 12 weeks depending on the job duties and skills to be attained.

Maqueisha's evaluations noted that she was an outstanding participant as she successfully mastered the job duties and skills for her occupation; however, she also wanted to learn job duties for other occupations within the Sheriff department.

The ultimate goal for the Work Experience (WEX) activity is to lead the participant to unsubsidized employment and self-sufficiency. In Maqueisha's case, that is exactly what happened. She was offered employment with the **Sumter County Sheriff's Department** after she successfully completed her Work Experience training. She is now working full-time and earning wages that allow her to support her family.



Maqueisha Smith and Officer Eric Bryant, **Sumter County Sheriff's Department**

## ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL EVENT... PRISON TO PEANUTS

River Valley Regional Commission and **Sumter** Cycling celebrated yet another successful year for the Prison to Peanuts Bicycle Adventure which connects the city of **Americus** to the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and Andersonville National Historic Site by bicycles. Over 135 participants from across the state and the



southeast participated in the event, which took place on Saturday, April 14 in downtown **Americus**. Stay tuned for next year's event date!

## National Bicycle Month

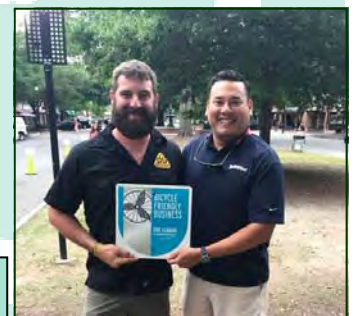
River Valley Regional Commission along with its partners Sumter Cycling and Bicycle Columbus, celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> annual Bicycle Week. The week's events included, in **Columbus**: Pedaling for Kids, Ride with the Mayor, National Ride of Silence and Bike to Work Day; and in **Americus**: Bike to Work Day (other events were cancelled due to inclement weather). Over all, over 400 cyclists region-wide participated in the week's festivities.



## BICYCLE FRIENDLY BUSINESS DESIGNATIONS WITHIN THE RIVER VALLEY REGION

The League of American Bicyclists, based in Washington D.C., awarded this year's Bicycle Friendly Business designations across the country. Three businesses were designated within the River Valley region which include: Habitat for Humanity, **Americus**, GA – Bronze Level, Fuller Center for Housing, **Americus**, GA – Silver Level and Ride on Bikes, **Columbus**, GA Platinum Level. Ride on Bikes, a locally owned and operated bicycle shop in **Columbus**, Georgia, became the first and only Platinum level business in the State of Georgia and 43<sup>rd</sup> nationwide. This designation is awarded to businesses that strive to encourage their employees to ride their bicycles to work and welcome patrons that visit their businesses by bicycle. Seven of the twenty-five Bicycle Friendly Businesses in the state of Georgia are located within the River Valley region.

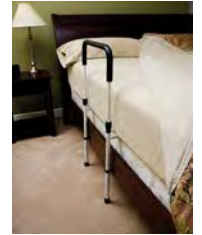
Jason McKenzie, Owner of Ride on Bikes and Julio Portillo, RVRC staff



**Assistive Technology** (AT) is any item that makes your life easier, no matter your age or ability! This is the first in a series of articles to explain some of the tools in the AT Labs in Columbus and Americus that are available for people to try. This allows the public to try out the various tools before purchasing anything. Not every tool is perfect for everybody!

The home bed assist handle is a useful item of assistive technology that may be beneficial to anyone that needs assistance getting into and out of their bed. This device can reduce the risk of harmful falls in the bedroom as well as limit the strain accompanied with getting out of bed in the morning.

The home bed assist handle is designed with a cushioned grip, as well as moveable legs, that allows the device to be adjusted to any height. The device also simply slides under the mattress making installation simple.



More information about the home bed assist handle, as well as many more assistive technology devices, is available at the River Valley Area Agency on Aging Assistive Technology Labs. The Assistive Technology Lab in **Americus** is open to the public on the first Friday of every month. The Assistive Technology Lab in **Columbus** is available by appointment. Call 1-800-615-4379 for more information.

## THE 2018 SENIOR WELLNESS WALK

was a huge success thanks to our many sponsors and partners! There were almost 300 seniors in attendance and 35+ vendors. The May 4th event, held at Peachtree Mall, was kicked off

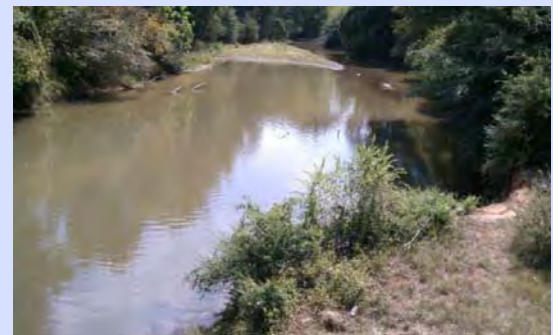


by **Columbus** City Councilor Jerry “Pops” Barnes and seniors from Arbor Cottages with a short Wellness Walk followed by Karaoke led by RVRC’s own DJ Emily Chambers; over 100 door prizes were given out between karaoke and a Tai Chi demonstration led by Gail Simpson and seniors from Calvary Community. Mark

May 3, 2019 on your calendars for the 2019 Senior Wellness Walk!

## LONG CANE CREEK WATERSHED PROJECT KICKS OFF

In June, the Environmental Planning Department began work on a Regional Water Plan Seed Grant for Long Cane Creek watershed located in Troup and **Harris** counties. This project will focus on updating the existing watershed based plan for Long Cane Creek watershed, which has a total of seven impaired stream segments, totaling 38 miles and one healthy stream segment, for a total of 9 miles. Water quality impairments include fecal coliform and biota (fish). The project will also support implementation of management practices identified in the Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water Plan. Short-term and long-term actions for each management practice to be addressed include developing a plan for increased monitoring, requesting funding for increased monitoring, implementing a monitoring plan, incorporating monitoring results into the revision plan process, and continuing to improve upon the documentation of best management practice implementation. Partners include Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD), Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water Planning Council, Three Rivers Regional Commission, and Troup and **Harris County** Board of Commissioners. Federal funds for the project total \$32,000.



## STAFF UPDATES

**Shellby Banta** is the new Regional Community and Bicycle-Pedestrian Planner. Before this position, Shelby served as an assistant planner at the RVRC for over two years. She graduated in 2017 from Columbus State University with a Bachelors Degree in Political Science, she is currently working on her Master's Degree in Public Administration. Shelby resides in Midtown and in her free time enjoys playing golf.



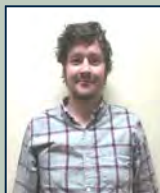
**Kassie Taylor** is the new Volunteer Coordinator at River Valley's Area Agency on Aging. She was raised in Griffin, Georgia where she played a lot of softball and held her first job at Chick-fil-a. She made her way down south to attend Columbus State University and earned her B.S. in Health Science. Kassie has experience working in fitness, healthcare, with families, and the elderly. In her free time she loves to travel, read, weightlift, bike, ski and spend time with her family. She lives in Columbus with her boyfriend Mat and one year old daughter Lilly.



**Ashlee Perryman** is the new HCBS Program Manager. She received her nursing degree from Southern Union Community College and has been a nurse for the last 10 years. Ashlee has previous experience in the areas of geriatrics, psychiatrics, dialysis, and med-surg/clinical nursing. She lives in Auburn, Alabama with her husband Maurice and two kids Abrianna, 11 and Micah, 6. Ashlee enjoys spending time with her family, cooking, and crafting. She said that she is glad to be a part of this company and looks forward to many successful years here!



Congratulations to **Robert Andrews**, Home & Community Based Case Manager (R) and **Elizabeth Young**, ADRC Counselor/ Case Manager (L) who are now Certified Information and Referral Specialists in the Aging/Disabilities field (CIRS-A/D).



Congratulations to **Dareion Hill**, GeorgiaCares Program Assistant, who has successfully completed the GeorgiaCares State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) and Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) Counselor Certification.



## RVRC STAFF GRADUATES FROM THE GEORGIA ACADEMY FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Laura Schneider**, Environmental Planner, graduated May 15th from the Georgia Academy for Economic Development. Class participants represented a number of professional and non-professional economic development fields, including six elected officials, public servants, business leaders, educators and social service providers from six counties in Region 8. Created in 1993, the Academy assembles a cross section of economic development professionals and resources to provide this training in all twelve service delivery regions in Georgia. The Board of Directors of the Academy represent public and private economic development organizations and agencies from across Georgia. Since its organization, the Academy has provided training for thousands of professional and non-professional economic developers around the state. Since 1998, the Academy has been offered annually in all twelve regions of the state. Georgia EMC and Georgia Power provide facilitators for the program and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs provides staff support.



The RVRC welcomes **Joyce Odame** who is a former employee of Legacy Link Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). SCSEP is a program to help seniors return to the workforce by assisting with job placement and job training. Joyce worked as a SCSEP employee for the RVRC/AAA for four (4) months and was hired in May to work part-time as a GeorgiaCares Program Assistant.



**Richard Clements**, has 30 years of computer programming experience and joins the RVRC Area Agency on Aging through the Legacy Link program of the Senior Community Service Employment Program. He is a Navy veteran, and has a Bachelor of Science degree from Columbus College. Except for his service, he has lived in the Columbus area since 1970. He has previous experience in the medical and insurance fields from working in data processing for Hughston Clinic for 8 years.



How can we help your community?

## *Tai Chi for Arthritis and Tai Chi for Fall Prevention* kicked

off its eight week session on March 12<sup>th</sup> at the **Randolph County** Senior Center in **Cuthbert**, Georgia. Tai Chi is an effective exercise program for people with arthritis. The program combines slow, smooth, gentle, and continuous movements that build muscular strength, as well as improving flexibility and fitness. About sixteen participants, ages 67 and older, learned basic Tai Chi movements in an effort to eliminate stiff joints and develop muscular strength. They also practiced shifting body weight, which improves balance and helps to prevent falls. Participants found that practicing Tai Chi helped to relieve pain and reduce stress. This is achieved by developing muscular strength that helps protect joints therefore reducing pain. Just as important, being physically active allows for increased blood and joint fluid flow which helps with mobility.

Participants recognized that practicing Tai Chi for about 10 – 30 minutes a day helps decrease or eliminate depression, relax the mind and aids the concentration process. Tai Chi also helps participants to maintain independence, increase energy, lessen stiffness, improve self-assurance, increase the desire to help others and live longer productive lives.



Seniors from **Randolph County** Senior Center enjoying a Tai Chi class.

## **OUTDOOR RECREATION FUNDING**

Three area counties have received conditional approval for Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF). The Georgia Department of Natural Resources, state administrative agency for the U. S. Department of Interior's National Park Service (NPS) program, received pre-applications in October and invited formal applications for a May deadline. Funding announcements are expected in the fall and require a 50/50 match.

**Crisp County** received conditional approval for a \$100K grant to completely replace Pickens Pool in **Cordele**. Originally envisioned and developed by a small group of community-minded residents, the pool has been in regular service since 1953. The **City of Cordele** performed a major renovation in the late 1970s. Despite regular maintenance, the cumulative effects of patching, repairing and the passage of time have made the pool uneconomical to maintain and too expensive for another renovation. The entire structure is to be demolished, removed and replaced on site.



Pickens Pool, Cordele, Georgia

In 1974, a local non-profit deeded approximately forty acres on **Talbotton's** north city limits to **Talbot County**, "to be used for park and recreation purposes." Proposed improvements to the **Talbot County** Youth Center include grounds improvements to ball fields, upgrades to game field lighting and dugouts, resurfacing both full-size basketball courts and parking, and renovations to restrooms, concessions and open-air pavilion. The only planned additions to the complex are a playground and perimeter fencing. The county sought \$56K from NPS.

**Harris County** was also invited to submit a formal application for its 22 mile Rails-to-Trails project.

**Funded for the past fifty-three years, in absence of Congressional action, the LWCF will expire September 30.** One of the very few public sources of recreation funding, the LWCF does not operate on taxpayer dollars, but is capitalized with earnings from offshore oil and gas leasing.

## WIOA Teams Up With Interfor U.S. for Incumbent Worker Registered Apprenticeship Training

WORKSOURCE GEORGIA MIDDLE FLINT WIOA is working with **Interfor U.S.** located in Preston (**Webster County**) to provide Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) for the Registered Apprenticeship project. This project is part of a statewide pilot project with five (5) local WIOA areas across Georgia.



**Interfor personnel: Above left to right: William Gordon, Rhonda Holbrook (Preston HR Coordinator) and Paul Jackson.**

This project will allow Interfor to select currently employed candidates from within their company to participate in the project. Individuals will continue working at the facility while they also attend classroom, hands-on and online training.

Interfor U.S. currently has seven (7) plant locations in Georgia. Interfor identified a need within their company to have advanced skilled journeyman positions to meet their needs and to have employment advancement for their employees. Interfor developed a training model which required approval from United States Department of Labor (USDOL) for a Registered Apprenticeship Journeyman training. This training is an intensive three (3) year training program.

WIOA assists with funding for the classroom and on-line training expenses. Interfor U.S. provides employment wages, travel and meal expenses during training, as well as other training related expenses.

The five (5) local WIOA areas worked closely with Interfor U.S. and the State WIOA Workforce Division to develop the statewide pilot project. Interfor started the project with 27 individuals participating in the five WIOA areas. Interfor is committed to helping their employees have advancement opportunities and to build a training structure that meets the company's employment needs. It's a winning combination for both employees and Interfor.

The **Middle Flint WIOA** area enrolled three (3) eligible individuals in the Interfor Preston Division project in June 2017. Interfor U.S. plans to add new apprenticeship trainees each year so that a continuous training system is in place.

The Interfor U.S. Preston Division Human Re-

sources Coordinator (Rhonda Holbrook) is a member of the local Middle Flint Workforce Development Board (WDB). Ms. Holbrook has seen first-hand how the opportunities and successes WIOA services can benefit both individuals and the local area business community.



**Above left to right: William Gordon and Paul Jackson**

Janice West, WIOA Director, states "the Interfor project has been a great project for the **Middle Flint WIOA** to participate in." The five local WIOA areas worked together to fast track and streamline local policies and processes to get the Interfor project up and running quickly. The State Workforce Division provided additional funding to the local WIOA areas to support the project.

## 2018 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT APPLICATIONS

The RVRC assisted nine (9) communities in the region in writing Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) applications for water, sewer and road projects. Collectively, \$5.3 million in applications were requested from the Department of Community Affairs. Projects included :

• <b>Cuthbert</b>	\$750,000	Sewer
• <b>Randolph County</b>	\$306,000	Street & Drainage
• <b>Richland</b>	\$750,000	Sewer
• <b>Stewart County</b>	\$750,000	Street & Drainage
• <b>Plains</b>	\$700,000	Water
• <b>Marion County</b>	\$260,000	Street & Drainage
• <b>Shellman</b>	\$307,000	Water
• <b>Vienna</b>	\$707,000	Sewer
• <b>Marshallville</b>	\$750,000	Water

As always, the most competitive applications are the ones with the best pictures. As you see problems in your community, please take the time to document them. Nothing tells the story of needs necessary to fund these projects like photographs.



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Chair—Clinton Perry, Jr.  
Executive Director—Patti Cullen

We're on the Web!  
[www.rivervalleyrc.org](http://www.rivervalleyrc.org)

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## *THE SHELLMAN GRAIN BINS...*

The Tourism Product Development Team from the Georgia Department of Economic Development visited **Randolph County** in 2016. One of the recommendations from their report was to paint a mural on the grain bins in **Shellman**. The grain bins are owned by Shellman Peanut and Grain and are prominently located in downtown Shellman next to the depot and the railroad tracks.

The **Randolph County** Chamber of Commerce worked with the City of **Shellman** to apply for two Tourism Product Development (TPD) Grants from the Georgia Department of Economic Development. The first grant amount was \$5,000 and the second was \$10,000. These TPD grants require a 60% match, which the City of **Shellman** provided.

The City of **Shellman** commissioned Chris Johnson, Assistant Professor of Visual Art and Director of the Visual Art Program at Andrew College, to paint the murals. Professor Johnson chose the images with **Shellman** giving the final approval.

The Grain Bin Murals were dedicated on May 21<sup>st</sup> at a ceremony in the **Shellman** Depot.

