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Route to the Ribbon Cutting

ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT



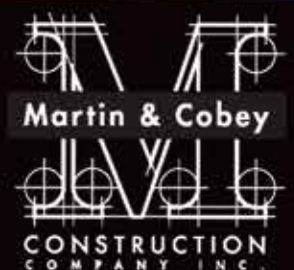


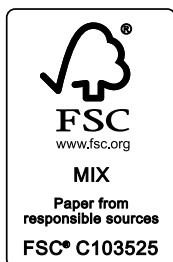
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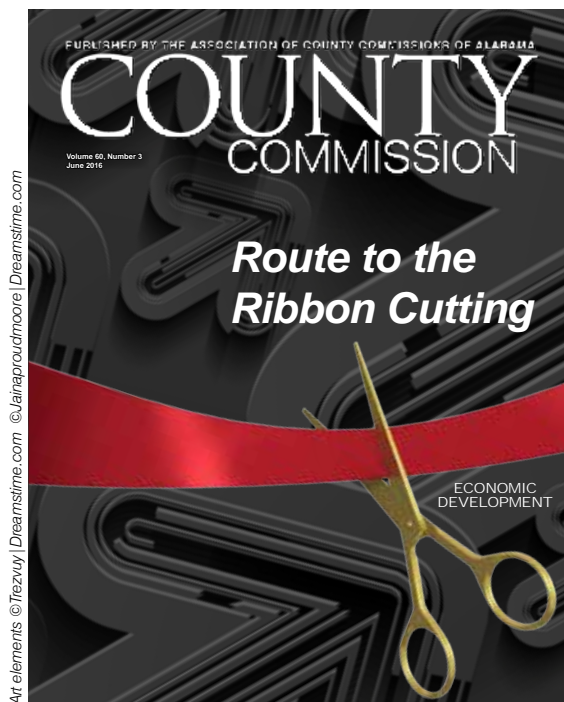
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in this issue

VOLUME 60, NUMBER 3



As the stewards of county economies, county commissioners play a co-starring role in Alabama's economic development process.



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President's PERSPECTIVE



Hon. Ray Long
President

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Ray Long". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ray" and last name "Long" clearly distinguishable.

Leadership & Collaboration:

The Keys to a Thriving Local Economy

Industry Recruitment.
Workforce Development.
Public-Private Partnerships.
All of these are buzzwords for the newest political 'IT' topic: economic development.

As both chairman of one of county commission in the state's ninth largest county and president of our Association, economic development is a motivating factor in almost everything we do. The growth of our communities; the safety and efficiency of our transportation system; the strength of our school systems, the availability of cost-effective government services; and the attractive life-style of our state have poised Alabama for even further growth.

Every elected and appointed official talks about economic development. Everyone knows all the correct buzz words. But far too often, political rhetoric fails to capture what is truly required to develop and sustain a thriving economy-- particularly at the county level.

As the stewards of county economies, county commissioners play a co-starring role in Alabama's economic development process. After all, we are responsible for numerous issues that directly and indirectly impact the economic health of our counties, and ultimately, the state as a whole. Everyday county leaders make decisions to ensure we can continue to provide our families, friends and neighbors with those essential services like emergency preparedness, public health programs, public works, criminal justice and public safety -- and oftentimes we do this with limited resources.

In a broader sense though, anything we do -- whether in our personal lives or as public servants -- that fosters a healthy economy could be considered 'development'. Teachers, bankers, and fire fighters, for example, all do work that contributes to the viability of the local economy.

On the surface, our job as economic developers at the county level primarily involves allocating resources -- land, capital, labor and other incentives -- in a way that positively impacts the communities we serve. While the public will generally measure a project's success or failure by the amount of business activity and employment opportunities created for local residents, I believe we can offer a little different measuring stick.

The single most important thing that county commissioners can do to support economic development is effective leadership. I'm not talking about simply "showing up" at the appropriate times but unabashedly accepting your seat at the table as a champion for your community. And each of us is in a unique position to do just that.

Sometimes moving a project along will require us to partner with people and organizations outside of our home county. There is no better example than the recent statewide-coordinated effort to pass a 6-cent gas tax increase this past legislative session. As major owners of infrastructure, all 67 counties directly deal with the road and bridge challenges that affect the development and competitiveness of local economies.

This year, county commissioners, county engineers, administrators

and other county officials from all over the state joined forces to show members of the legislature the dire need for new revenues to support county road and bridge projects. But we didn't stop there. County leaders also collaborated with business leaders, farmers, and industry experts to further promote this message. And though our efforts were unsuccessful this go-around, the relationships we built during the collaborative process will undoubtedly put us in a stronger position to pass this revenue measure in the future.

As you continue to flip through the pages of this magazine, you will see specific examples of county leaders who, through collaborative efforts, were able to overcome what seemed like insurmountable odds to improve their local economies.

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As the stewards of county economies, county commissioners play a co-starring role in Alabama's economic development process.
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Collaboration is the glue that holds together any economic development project of real significance. As communities continue to develop a more regional approach to economic development, the importance of collaboration between counties will become increasingly important. Our job as county leaders is to capitalize on all the various nonprofit, governmental, public and private partnerships necessary to make our local economies thrive. But again,

we cannot do that if we have not taken our place as the leaders and champions for our communities.

A common set of factors influence a community's ability to build a strong economy and thus create long-term opportunities for its citizens. And yes – those buzzwords like industry recruitment, workforce development, and public-private partnerships are very important to the process. None of those things happens in the absence of leadership and collaboration.

One thing is clear: county governments are increasingly seen as the drivers of economic development on the regional level. In order for our communities to thrive – and dare I say, survive – county commissioners must fully embrace this important new role. ■

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Sonny Brasfield
Executive Director

Sonny Brasfield

State's economic future grounded in county government's support

Counties, cities and industrial recruiters need to be full partners

Twenty years ago, it would have been unusual for an issue of the Association's magazine to focus on economic development. Back then, county commissions were often an afterthought when community leaders sought to bring in new employers.

Industry recruiters would make sure the president of a prospective company blew into town to meet the mayor, city council members, school superintendent, bankers, legislators and, honestly, just about everyone who was anyone in the neighborhood – everyone except the county commissioners. As you will read elsewhere in this edition, times have changed.

Unfortunately, the events of the last six months have made it clear that we've still got a way to go. Let me explain.

An opinion issued by Attorney General Luther Strange in January actually authorized cities that do not collect property taxes to waive countywide property taxes in order to attract a new or expanding industry *without seeking the consent of the county commission*. The opinion reversed a decade of practice in Alabama and would be, we thought, very simple to correct. We assumed we would have the full support of the state's economic development community.

After all, how could economic development recruiters – who seek help, support and financial backing from the county commission to attract new industry – actually come to Montgomery and testify that commissioners should have no say in the abatement of their own taxes?

But that's exactly what happened. Three times during the 2016

regular session, leaders in economic development showed up at legislative committee meetings and testified that cities and their industrial recruitment boards – even those that do not levy taxes themselves – should make decisions about county taxes.

County commissioners from all over the state were dumbfounded when they learned that people with household names were calling legislators to say commissioners can't be expected to make decisions on their own. People who normally seek the help of counties were actually burning up the phones to express opposition to county government having a voice in their own tax base. They did this knowing that the recruitment of a new or expanding industry generates additional demands on county services and the county budget. And in most cases, property tax proceeds are the major source of revenue for the county commission's general fund expenses.

With the help of the president of the Economic Development Association of Alabama, counties and developers eventually reached an agreement on what should have been one of the easiest bills ever passed. But even that cooperative agreement didn't tell the ultimate story. After the new approach was made public by EDAA, one of the state's most powerful Senators – and a good friend to county government – still opposed the bill on the next-to-last night of the session. At the request of his local economic development officials, he expressed "serious concerns" about counties making their own decisions. Again, commissioners throughout the state were dumbfounded.

On the last night of the session, the bill was finally passed and sent

to Gov. Robert Bentley. But the opposition to protecting the county role in tax abatements didn't stop there. Gov. Bentley was actually urged by some in the development community to veto the legislation. Dumbfounded again, more pleas were made to the governor, and he signed the bill into law without reservation.

I'm sure that bringing all this to light seems a bit confusing. After all, the bill was eventually passed, the law has now been corrected, and this issue of the Association's magazine is supposed to be about the critical role that counties play in the recruitment world.

Well, that's clearly not the case.

Even though we finally corrected one element of the existing law on abatements, cities that actually levy their own property taxes are still authorized to abate county taxes – without permission. And those cities

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How could economic development recruiters – who seek help, support and financial backing from the county commission to attract new industry – actually come to Montgomery and testify that commissioners should have no say in the abatement of their own taxes?
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can even abate county taxes outside their corporate limits. Even municipal economic development authorities, which are composed of citizens (not elected officials), can do the same thing. Again, all without the consent of the county commission.

This session the Alabama Legislature also passed another bill,

supported by the Association, which requires an annual accounting and evaluation of the return-on-investment on the state's existing abatement programs. That's more evidence that, in our opinion, Alabama's entire tax abatement process needs a comprehensive retread.

Over the last two decades, almost every significant economic recruitment announcement has been grounded in an unincorporated area or an established industrial development park. That trend is not likely to change. And it's clear that our state's economic development future is firmly grounded in the support of county government.

Going forward, it is essential that counties, cities and industrial recruiters be full partners in this process. But if the behind-the-scene events of the last six months are a barometer, we still have a way to go. ■

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IN LEGAL TERMS



Mary E. Pons
Association Counsel

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary E. Pons".

**One big,
close-knit family
& a force to be
reckoned with**

**And I am
ever-thankful
for 20 lucky
years**

Twenty lucky years ago, I walked into 100 N. Jackson St. to interview for the position of staff attorney at the Association. I knew little about the work of this group, nor whether it was something that would suit me. Truthfully, I was unhappy in my current position and looking for a career move. I left that first interview determined that I was going to do whatever I could to convince Mr. Buddy Sharpless to hire me for this position. And I am forever grateful that he did. I did not know that when I sat at that desk in the front office that first morning in November 1996, I had found my professional home and that when I chose to leave 20 years later, it would be one of the hardest things I would ever do.

This place is so special. The work is demanding, challenging, and incredibly rewarding. I have had the great pleasure to work for two of the finest men I have ever known in an office of dedicated, hard-working co-workers. And best of all, I have had the great pleasure to work for people all over this state who have dedicated their lives to public service as county officials and employees – and have become my family in so many important ways. The frequent “thank yous” for helping out with an issue, the warm offers of condolence following the loss of parents, the sweet notes of appreciation, and the friendships – those strong and enduring friendships – these have all made this so much more than a career for me.

We have accomplished so much together – created a constitutional amendment making it difficult for the legislature to impose an unfunded mandate against county

government, repeatedly protected the counties’ share of interest from the Alabama Trust Fund, set up a process for counties to implement health and safety powers, and slowly but surely worked to “modernize” many of the laws applicable to county government. We developed a bond issue to allow for the repair or replacement of structurally deficient bridges and were partners in the ATRIP program to provide monies for badly-needed county road and bridge work. And, if ratified by the voters at the November election, we will have perfected a process for counties to implement administrative powers and improved the process for voting on local constitutional amendments. I could take this entire column listing our accomplishments – projects we can all be proud of and proud that we succeeded by working together – as 67 counties with one voice – one big, close-knit family.

There have been many changes during my tenure. There was no email or internet access in 1996, and I had a “car phone” instead of a device that kept me in touch with everything 24 hours a day. And during this period, many people have come and gone. It was always hard to watch a commissioner lose his or her election, but good to meet the new “class” – and get to help them understand and learn about what it really is to be a county commissioner. And as in any large family, there have been too many funerals of too many dear souls who have left us – often much too soon. I have so enjoyed getting to know the county family – even as it has changed over the years.

There are many things that make this Association a special place and

a successful organization, but none more important than its leadership. As I look back on the ACCA presidents and board members who have served during my tenure, it is easy to see how we are, in fact, a force to be reckoned with. It has been an honor to get to know each Association president well – and to work with them throughout their years as officer. Each of these presidents has served this organization – and happily, each is someone I will always call friend.

And leadership in this organization goes well beyond county officials. County personnel are an indispensable part of this Association. The affiliate groups, led by dedicated career professionals, lead the way in helping to form county government platforms, troubleshoot where problems

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Best of all, I have had the great pleasure to work for people all over this state who have dedicated their lives to public service as county officials and employees – and have become my family in so many important ways.
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arise, and assist Association staff in developing solutions to serious problems facing counties. Working with each of these groups over the years has been a highlight for me – and county government is served well by the diligent efforts of

the personnel who make up these groups.

I love this place – and leave with such mixed emotions. But I leave knowing counties will be well cared for after I am gone. The working environment at the Association is such that, with few exceptions, people who come to work here make this their career. Part of the big family atmosphere of county government is the great staff I have had the honor of working with in the Association office for so many years. Each staff member shows dedication to the membership every day – and dedication to each other and our leader, Sonny Brasfield, who approaches each day with great determination, enthusiasm, passion, and compassion. To have partnered with Sonny and Buddy for all these years is a blessing I count every day.



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IN LEGAL TERMS

When I came to the Association, I filled a position that had been vacant for more than a year, and over time, I built it into something of which I admit I am very proud. In looking for my replacement, it was so important to me that we select someone who would care for what has been built over the last 20 years – and someone who will take it in new directions, with new enthusiasm, skill, and dedication. I feel confident we have found that person in Morgan. And with Chase, Terri, and Morgan working under Sonny's leadership, the Association has a dynamic, bright, and dedicated "policy team" that brings a new energy to the Association's legislative activities that will serve county government well for many years to come. Just look at our accomplishments in the 2016 Legislative Session – passing 10 priority items during a very grueling session and ensuring as late as 11:30 on the last night of the session that no bills negatively impacting counties would make it through the process. This new team – following Sonny's lead – made it happen by approaching each day with a new determination that each member of this Association deserves and that I hope I gave during my time. And each member of this team left at the close of the session talking about how next year would be better yet.

So now I move into a new phase of my life. I am happy and sad, excited and scared, but ever thankful for the opportunity I was given 20 years ago – and pleased that while my role is changing, I will still be on hand to help out as I can for the betterment of county government. I hope our paths will continue to cross in the years to come, but I take this opportunity to say "thank you"

to every member of this Association – past and present – for the great kindness and respect you have shown me, the great pleasure to have worked with you over the years, and,

most importantly, those strong and enduring friendships. In the very wise words of Buddy Sharpless – this is a great place to work. I loved it – and I love each of you. ■





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Recollections & Best Wishes
Speaking of...



Mary Pons

Mary has done a lot of great things for counties, and one that has proven most helpful to me is the Reference Manual for County Engineers. She single-handedly gathered all the Alabama statutes and attorney general opinions that relate to any subject a county engineer might run across and combined them into this manual. If a county engineer or county attorney is not using this manual, he or she is doing a lot of unnecessary work. — **Randy Tindell, Coffee Co. Engineer**

I think of Mary as a second mother. When a pressing issue would arise, she always said, “Calm down; we can handle it.” When she became the CROAA liaison, she took care of us. Rarely do you find a person that honors their word and holds things in confidence, yet she did this so many times. I will truly miss her and her spunky Okie attitude. — **Kirk Keith, Tuscaloosa Co.**

She’s so dependable, and I have a tremendous respect for her. Sometimes when I’d call, she’d say, ‘I don’t know what you mean. You’ve got to slow down. You’re rambling.’ She’d have to straighten me out. Mary would tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear, and I like that. — **Chairman Roger Hayes, Winston Co.**

“Ms. Pons” has been a friend and a resource my entire tenure in county government. We have worked on an abundance of projects; many of which were firsts for our state and even a few were firsts for the nation. “Ms. Pons” always has expended every ounce of her efforts to make county government better. To that I say thank you for everything. You are a consummate professional and a great friend. — **Richie Beyer, Elmore Co. Engineer**

You don’t have enough magazine to publish all the Mary Pons stories I could tell. Suffice it to say that no one has been a better friend, advocate and advisor to me than Mary. She and I are about as opposite politically as two people can be, but our common interest in the good of county government and having a little fun along the way has made us forever friends and allies. — **Chairman Mark Culver, Houston Co. Commission**

Most people knew what her answer to legal questions would be before we asked. “No, you know you can’t do that! You know better.” I did, but I had to ask “Mom” anyway. She always made me feel better about the situation, just like a good mom would. She would not admit it, but she will miss the ACCA Joint Bid Program. She learned more about equipment, herbicides and road signs than she ever wanted to know, but she did a wonderful job operating outside of her comfort zone. — **Patrick McDougald, Barbour Co. Engineer**

While I could spend hours writing about Mary’s many contributions to the ACCA and county government, some come to mind most profoundly. The things she accomplished working with the legislature were simply incredible. She and Sonny were the perfect team and because of that county government in Alabama is greatly improved. Through the years, thousands of county officials and employees benefited from her sound practical and legal advice. She helped them perform their

responsibilities effectively and stay out of trouble. The importance of her involvement in the performance of the many services and programs provided by the ACCA cannot be overstated. Her personal involvement and advice to other staff members was invaluable. Thank you, Mary, for all you have done. I know God will bless you during your retirement years. — **Buddy Sharpless, Retired Executive Director, ACCA**

Throughout the years I have leaned on Mary for advice and guidance on many different issues; while some of those responses were not necessarily what I wanted to hear, I trusted and valued her opinion. I always appreciated her straightforwardness and willingness to help. — **Chad Sowell, E-911 Director, Henry Co.**

One of the biggest challenges county engineers face is deciphering subdivision law and regulations. The model regulations written by Mary have helped us navigate the maze that is subdivision law. In addition, the Joint Bid program has been the largest benefit to county engineering in terms of saving time and money. Year after year she has been on the front lines administering this program. Thank you, Mary, for making my job easier over these many years. — **Chris Champion, Henry Co. Engineer**

When I was in the Alabama Senate, she was always the “go-to” person who could tell you the good and bad about legislation affecting counties. As a county attorney, I also know she has been very valuable at the local

level. The many times I called on her over her distinguished years of service, she never failed to give me the correct answer or insight. — **Roger H. Bedford Jr., Franklin Co. Attorney**

I express my sincere gratitude for the guidance I have received from Mary Pons during my tenure as the Limestone County Administrator and for leading Bob and I to a great blues festival. “A rainy day at King Biscuit is still better than a good day at work!” — **Pam Ball, Limestone Co. Administrator**

Mary has been an exceptional jewel by keeping Sumter County informed when there were dangerous local as well as state bills. We will definitely miss calling Mary anytime we need advice. Mary, I know you are not going to sit still and do nothing. Thank you for your hard work and dedication! You will be missed. — **Commissioner Drucilla Russ-Jackson, Sumter Co.**



Mary Pons has always been an advocate for county government and, for those of us working in this profession as well. Her loyalty is unquestioned, her dedication immense, and willingness to assist unrivaled. With this said,

the most important role Mary has played is being a true friend. By the way Mary, I will need a cell number because I have an ambulance question... — **Mark Tyner, Bibb Co. Administrator**

Whenever I call Mary with a question, usually a legal one, but sometimes a simple ‘what do you

think about this idea?’ she always takes the time to respond. She never told me you have county attorneys ask them. She knew that if I called her I needed her level of expertise to feel comfortable moving forward on whatever path I was considering. I will truly miss having her as a sounding board, a voice of caution and a sage advisor. — **Commissioner Merceria Ludgood, Mobile Co.**

Mary Pons is special; special in her willingness to help; special in her great knowledge; special in her legal skills; special as a human being. I will miss her dearly as she moves into retirement. I don’t know what so many of us will do without her. Still I hope and pray that she enjoys every moment of this well-earned reward. — **State Sen. Hank Sanders, Greene & Lowndes Co. Attorney**

Mary is family to me. Whenever I call with any question about county government she is always there with an answer and has been all these years. I don’t know what I would have done without her. When I call just to talk (vent) she is always there. She is my friend and always will be. You deserve your retirement; enjoy it to the fullest. — **Sherrie Kelley, Etowah Co. Administrator**

I met Mary at my first education class, and she soon became my No. 1 advisor. I can never explain how helpful and even calming Mary has been for me. I’ve always felt like she has given this commissioner from a small rural county the same time and attention that she affords those from larger counties. — **Commissioner Bill Albritton, Wilcox Co.**

One thing that I always admire about Mary is that when I had a question, she would do some research and make sure what she was telling you was accurate. — **Commissioner Rhondel B. Rhone, Clarke Co.** ■



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Economic Development on 3 Fronts

You could say high-stakes economic development is a lot like football in more ways than just sheer competitiveness. Both can be viewed on a surface level, but winners understand countless deeper levels.

For a fan, following a football game can be as complicated as you want. The score alone may tell you everything you need to know. Others will critique every play called, every defensive strategy.

After a game, the winning coach gets a minute or two to sum everything up, but he would need to talk for a week to even begin to explain how every element came together. One framework that helps make sense of things is to think in terms of offense, defense and special teams. Every game, the coach wants to see progress on all three fronts.

In much the same way, a ribbon-cutting ceremony would go on for days if every person involved in the announcement were thanked and every contribution recognized. And in economic development, communities move ahead when there is a team effort to improve on three fronts simultaneously.

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County Case Studies
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Economic Development

Public Strategies to Boost Private Investment

The still-expanding Mercedes plant started it all more than 20 years ago, and Alabama's list of economic development wins just keeps growing – Honda, Hyundai, Airbus, Google, Polaris and more.

In broadest terms, “economic development” is just the name for public strategies designed to increase private investment. That investment might take the form of a billion-dollar manufacturing plant, but forward-thinking community leaders also work to bolster existing industries, retail and tourism. Attracting retirees is another valid approach.

That's all according to Joe Sumners, Ph.D., who has 25 years' experience supporting economic development at the local level across Alabama.

Looking to the next level of detail, he says those strategies can be grouped into three different types of infrastructure:

- Physical infrastructure – everything from roads to basic utilities to internet connectivity.
- Human infrastructure – the current and future workforce.
- Civic infrastructure – the capacity for community members from all walks of life to work together on common goals.

In a best-case scenario, community leaders are working on all three fronts simultaneously, just as football teams work to improve on offense, defense and special teams.

Economic development is a complex issue in a fiercely competitive environment, so no one strategy is enough.



Human Infrastructure:
Workforce Development from Pre-K to Job Skills

Power Player

Workforce development cannot be overlooked



If all you saw were the ESPN highlights, you might get the impression that just a handful of football players won the big game by themselves, but the rest of the team knows there is more to the story.

In economic development, the headlines tend to favor tax incentives and transportation infrastructure, but, once again, it would be a mistake to think that was the whole story.

Human infrastructure is a major factor, as Pickens County Commissioner Frederick Kennedy knows, though that is not where he started out. Like so many

officials in rural counties, Kennedy came into office in 2010 with a concern about jobs and industrial recruitment.

“We’ve got over 5,000 people leaving here on a day-to-day basis to work in Tuscaloosa,” Kennedy said.

Over the last 20 years, there has been a shift toward county commissions becoming more involved in economic development. Pickens County has sped through much of that transition in the last 6 years due to Kennedy’s efforts.

“I just had a different take on what we should be doing,” he said.

As a newly elected commissioner, one day Kennedy picked up the phone and called Ed Castile at AIDT, Alabama’s workforce development agency. He introduced himself and said he was on a mission to bring jobs to Pickens County.

What turned into a lengthy conversation did not exactly go in the direction Kennedy expected. “He told me, ‘You can recruit all the industry you want, but you’ve got to get people ready to work,’” Kennedy said.

Undaunted, Kennedy went to work, convening leaders from throughout Pickens County and calling on state experts from AIDT and other agencies.

What grew out of these conversations was an organization, the Pickens County Workforce and Economic Development Partnership, and a 24-point workforce development plan.

The partnership united the efforts of state and local governments, K-12 education, the local two-year college, the chambers of commerce, the hospital, area ministers, one of the county’s largest employers and others. Their workforce development plan is due to conclude in September, and one

from the cover



Case Study **Pickens** **County**

of the biggest successes has been re-opening the public school system’s vocational high school. It had been closed for 13 years, and only two career programs survived.

Today, the Pickens County Career Tech Center has expanded course offerings and construction is underway on new facilities. No matter which high school students are zoned for, they have transportation to the career tech center.

Castile says workforce is the main driver of economic development decisions, because companies want a trained or trainable workforce that can be sustained for the long haul.

“Often in a rural county, no one takes the ‘bull by the horns’ and pushes for real reform and improvements. My guess, it is perceived as too much work,” Castile said. “Commissioner Kennedy’s remarkably different in the fact that not only has he focused on changes that will help create jobs and opportunities, but he has spent countless hours in meetings developing strategies that will make a long and lasting impact on Pickens County citizens.”

To follow this approach, leaders can “figure out what you have in the county; study the federal, state and local resources to determine what is missing; develop a strategy to go forward; and then just do it,” Castile said. ■



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Physical Infrastructure: Transportation & Utilities

The Growing List of ‘Must-Haves’

If you think the forward pass revolutionized the game of football, you should see how broadband internet has changed economic development.

“The time has come to where it’s an essential utility, as essential as water or power,” says Commissioner Rayburn Massey in Franklin County.

Roads and other long-standing types of physical infrastructure are no less important for economic development.

When it comes to reliance on broadband, many smaller businesses are not far behind the big employers. Available, affordable broadband service is increasingly critical for the local auto body shop, the home office and the family farmer’s sophisticated equipment, state and county leaders say.

Take Tidco Transportation Inc., a Winston County trucking company with 45 people on payroll. Regulators require data-intense monitoring of drivers as well as regular reports that can only be submitted online.

The owners may have no choice but to relocate for better internet service, says Kathy Johnson, director of broadband development for the state of Alabama.

About 1 in 4 Alabamians live where broadband is not available

at any price, making this a state of “the fast and the furious,” as Johnson puts it. Areas with broadband want more – faster connections and more providers. The furious, usually in rural areas, just want an affordable wired connection with broadband speed.

The Chambers County Industrial Park, situated in an unincorporated area along Interstate 85, is home to auto suppliers that receive – via internet – a new order every 30 seconds. The current broadband service is working well, but plant managers are concerned about having a good backup option, says Valerie Gray of the Chambers County Development Authority.

People often turn to wireless options (i.e., satellite or cell phone data), but these are slow and expensive. Cost can vary with how much data is used, adding unpredictability to the financial

considerations.

Johnson said there’s a mom in Henry County who said she cannot afford to allow her four school-age children to do online research for their homework. A teleworker required to download and transmit large data files for business purposes, most months she spends nearly half of her take-home pay for internet service on a slow, wireless modem with a limited data plan. ■



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BY THE NUMBERS | Broadband in Alabama

**38 states
ahead of Alabama
in % of residents with
broadband access**

**1.2 million
Alabamians
without access to wired
broadband
(estimated)**

**912,000
residents underserved
single broadband
provider has a
monopoly in their area**

Broadband or Bust

Tourism is often touted as a slightly “outside the box” way to boost a local economy, and Franklin County is well along that path.

There are nearly 30 miles of equestrian trails, not to mention waterfalls, scenic canyons and even a natural stone bridge. The county has its own stop on the North Alabama Birding Trail, lakes for fishing, plus campgrounds and cabins.

Local officials say the county’s tourism revenue is already outpacing some of its more populous neighbors. “The potential is here,” said County Commissioner Rayburn Massey. But there’s one missing piece: widely available broadband internet service.

What does that have to do with riding horses and looking at leaves in the fall? More than you might think initially, said Frank Hoehn, the county’s technical project manager.

For example, one visitor came in for a family riding trip with a million-dollar rig between the RV and horse trailer. His family loved the trails, but he needed a high-speed internet connection. “He’s a stockbroker, and he couldn’t do his business,” Hoehn said.

That instance is just one of the many reasons Franklin County leaders have taken up the motto “Broadband or bust.”

At present, some 43 percent of the county’s roughly 30,000 residents are underserved with the existing broadband options, a stumbling

Downloading a 10MB file

Technology	Download Speed	Time
3G Cellular, DSL Lite, T-1	1.5 Mbps	71.1 seconds
4G LTE Cellular	10 Mbps	10.6 seconds
DSL Extreme	18 Mbps	5.9 seconds
Cable Extreme, Basic Fiber	50 Mbps	2.1 seconds
Gigabit Fiber	8,000 Mbps	0.1 seconds

Source: University of Georgia, <http://alpha.itos.uga.edu/speeddemo/>



©Volodymyr Melnyk | Dreamstime.com



Case Study Franklin County

block that hurts household economies too. The job application process with many major retailers is online, and low-income seniors must apply online for vouchers to use for fresh produce at the farmer’s market.

“Franklin County knows the need and the cost,” Massey said. “Like everyone else, lack of funding is the problem.”

It would take about \$3 million to achieve the needed broadband

expansion through a public-private partnership. If recent history is any guide, local leaders are likely to persevere. In a five-year effort, they secured fiber optic connectivity to their industrial park, county facilities and Russellville’s municipal buildings.

“I go back and think about Job and all he went through,” said Massey, citing younger generations as a major motivator. “And I keep pressing on.” ■

QUICK REFERENCE | Internet Connectivity

KEY TERMS

Bandwidth – the amount of data that can be carried from one point to another over time

Broadband – the label for internet connections that meet a minimum standard for speed.

In 2015 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) set this minimum definition of broadband:

Download speed

25 megabits per second (Mbps)

Upload speed

3 megabits per second (Mbps)

Latency – basically travel time for data. Latent time is the gap between when data is sent and when the source receives confirmation that the data was received.

Mbps – megabit per second. The unit of measurement for bandwidth.

Mb vs. MB – Data storage (i.e. memory on a smartphone) is often measured in megabytes (MB). But for internet connection speeds, a much smaller chunk of data is used as the base unit, the megabit (Mb). (Note the lowercase “b”)

8 megabits (Mb) = 1 megabyte (MB)

Types of internet connections – A few of the most common types of wired internet connections

- Digital subscriber line (DSL) – uses the same copper lines as a traditional land-line phone. Generally not capable of broadband speed.

- Cable modem – uses the same lines that deliver pictures and sound to TVs.

- Fiber optic – data travels via transparent glass fibers about the diameter of a human hair. Its speed far exceeds DSL and cable, and it is also faster than wireless connections.

Broadband Facts	
Fixed broadband consumer disclosure	
Choose Your Service Data Plan for 50Mbps Service Tier	
Monthly charge for month-to-month plan	\$60.00
Monthly charge for 2 year contract plan	\$55.00
Click here for other pricing options , including promotions and options bundled with other services, like cable television and wireless services.	
Other Charges and Terms	
Data included with monthly charge	300GB
Charges for additional data usage – each additional 50GB	\$10.00
Optional modem or gateway lease – Customers may use their own modem or gateway; click here for safety policy	\$16.00/month
Other monthly fees	Not Applicable
One-time fees	
Activation fee	\$50.00
Deposit	\$50.00
Installation fee	\$25.00
Early termination fee	\$240.00
Government Taxes and Other Government-Related Fees May Apply: Varies by location	
Other: accounts up network	
Performance - download speeds may vary	
Typical speed downstream	53 Mbps
Typical speed upstream	5 Mbps
Typical latency	35 milliseconds
Typical packet loss	0.08%
Network Management	
Application-specific network management practices?	Yes
Subscriber-triggered network management practices?	Yes
More pricing options (in request)	
Privacy See our privacy policy	
Complaints or Inquiries	
To contact us: call (800) 123-4567 To submit complaints to the FCC: online (888) 225-5322	
Learn more about the broadband speed test and other broadband information at the FCC's website.	

FIND OUT MORE

www.pc.net/glossary
Definitions of common computer & internet terms

www.speedtest.net
Test the speed of your internet connection

www.broadbandnow.com/alabama

or www.broadbandmap.gov
Find broadband providers in your area

Sources

Kathy Johnson

<http://pc.net/glossary/definition/latency>

<https://opensignal.com/knowledgebase/the-difference-between-megabyte-and-megabit.php>

Digital Divide: Broadband in Alabama

County Commission Magazine posed a few questions to Kathy Johnson, director of Gov. Robert Bentley's Office of Broadband Development.

How many Alabamians don't have access to broadband?

According to Broadband Now, Alabama ranks 39th in the nation for the percentage of population that has access to what the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) defines as broadband. (Since 2015, the FCC's minimum broadband speeds are 25 Mbps for downloads and 3 Mbps for uploads. That means downloads move 500 times faster than they would with dial-up service.) The speed thresholds that drive the evolving definition of broadband continue to increase along with the ever-growing need for adequate bandwidth that allows one to use current and forthcoming online applications.

With the current definition, nearly one-fourth of Alabama's population is lacking access to "wired broadband."

Broadband Now estimates there are 1.2 million people in Alabama

without access to a wired connection capable of 25 Mbps download speeds. There are 912,000 people in Alabama that have access to only one wired provider, leaving them no options to switch if they are dissatisfied with their service. Another 256,000 people in Alabama don't have any wired internet providers available where they live.



Johnson



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What's the trend in broadband access in Alabama?

Alabama's footprint has not reflected a much-needed closure to this huge digital divide between the broadband "haves" and "have nots." The trend has sadly been one of the "haves" having more, and the "have nots" unfortunately still "having not."

Where does wireless service fit?

Mobile wireless and satellite broadband are pretty much available across the state.

Although they're useful for serving remote or sparsely populated areas, there are some disadvantages. The cost of monthly service plans for wireless and satellite can also be higher and have data limits that, when exceeded, result in higher costs and/or reduced speeds.

In Alabama, there isn't any wireless coverage at speeds above minimum broadband. While there are evolving wireless technologies

that will deliver faster speeds, most wireless and satellite technologies right now simply do not have the capability of delivering speed tiers and reliability that some residential and many business consumers require.

But minimum broadband is apparently not fast enough, especially for big employers. What's driving the near frenzy for connections that are faster than broadband?

I know most people don't subscribe to broadband just for video downloads, but it's an easy way to explain download capabilities. In a work environment, the video could easily be training instead of a movie. A BluRay video would take a little over 13 minutes to download on high-speed broadband. The same video would take you 5 hours and 35 minutes to download on a slower 4 Mbps connection. Compare



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from the cover

these speeds and time requirements to a work day, to researching information, to completing tasks or homework or communicating via video-conference. You can easily see how time can quickly be consumed with attempting to complete tasks over slow and unreliable connections, and why people in so many of our rural communities are frustrated.

What's the significance of the many special broadband initiatives that have been in the news lately?

With recent announcements, it is evident that Alabama leaders understand the critical role that true high-speed internet plays in nearly every aspect of our lives. They understand it, and they're enthusiastically doing something about it. The Google Data Center in Jackson County, the launch of the Montgomery Internet Exchange

(MIX), and the partnership of The Broadband Group, Huntsville Utilities and Google Fiber are all key examples of how Alabama is rapidly becoming a leader in the technology arena. These are significant developments for not only the cities in which they are located, but for the state as a whole. They, along with other projects, will bring well-paying jobs, attract workers, bolster other economic development and improve broadband speeds available to communities they serve.

What financial assistance is available to counties to address broadband issues?

A few federal agencies have programs with grants or loans for projects involving broadband infrastructure, planning and research. A great guide including links to information on eligibility and the

application processes, can be found at http://www2.ntia.doc.gov/files/broadband_fed_funding_guide.pdf.

For officials who want their counties to move forward in a big way, whom should they contact?

We are working with a number of counties and municipalities across the state by helping them identify their existing broadband options, providing guidance on how to pursue a public-private partnership with an existing provider, how to identify potential funding and other valuable resources for addressing broadband gaps, and much more. We are happy to help, and we encourage anyone seeking broadband information to contact our office. The best way to reach us is via email to kathy.johnson@obd.alabama.gov. ■



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Community-wide teamwork can make positive economic impact

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If a sports analyst borrowed the lingo of an economic development workshop, he might describe a successful football team like this: as a diverse community that is working collaboratively toward a common goal.

Or is that just a fancy – and detailed – way of saying teamwork?

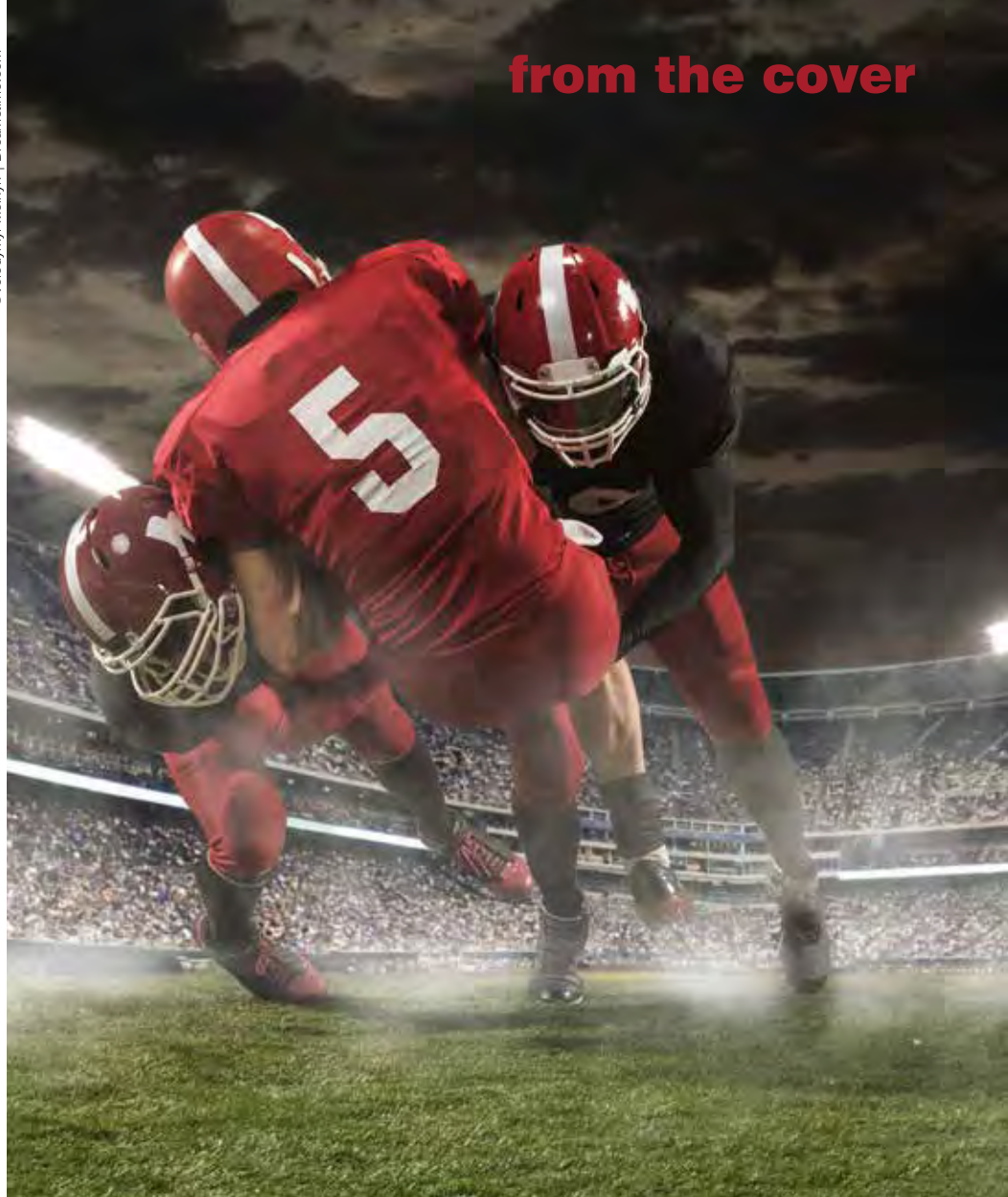
- Diverse because players have different jobs, strengths and viewpoints;
- Collaborative because everyone works together;
- Toward a common goal because everyone agrees on what constitutes a win.

Teamwork is also a good way to think of civic infrastructure or community, factors which are not to be overlooked in economic development efforts.

“To have a strong economy, you have to have a strong community,” said Joe Sumners Ph.D., executive director of Auburn University’s Government and Economic Development Institute.

When an underdog comes out on top on the football field, people often speak of intangibles that helped a team find a way to win. Effective civic infrastructure is like that – a network of relationships that helps overcome obstacles.

To strengthen civic infrastructure in your county, here



from the cover

Civic Infrastructure: Teamwork & Community

are a few things to bear in mind drawn from two of Sumners’ publications (see endnote):

1. Leadership needs to be diverse. Effective leaders may not always have a title or position, but they may well have something to offer.

2. Leaders think of their role as being catalysts who convene people and resources and help build consensus.

3. Strong collaboration overcomes the “silo mentality.” Knowledge and information are shared, and people work to bridge pre-existing divides in service of the common goal.

4. Diverse citizens are engaged. Residents are not just consumers of public services or community resources. They know they have a role to play in identifying and achieving common goals.

5. Community mindset of pride and optimism. The opposite of “somebody ought to do something about this problem.” Marked by an attitude of “working together, we can do something about this.” ■

**Endnote: “Crossroads and Connections: Strategies for Rural Alabama” by Joe A. Sumners and Larry Lee. Auburn University Economic Development Institute, 2004. | “Strategies for Small Town Success” in “Building the Local Economy: Cases in Economic Development,” Watson, D. J., & Morris, J. C. (Eds.). (2008). Athens, GA: Carl Vinson Institute of Government.*

'You need everybody working together'

Not long ago, when Marcus Campbell drove out Sumter County Road 13, he saw a park with overgrown grass, scattered litter and a rundown playground.

But the county commissioner remembered when the park was a hub of community life. "Parents knew where their kids were," he said. Kids would ride their bikes 10 miles or more for the pick-up basketball games on Sunday afternoons. "You better not lose – because you may not get back on the court that day," he said.

He is about to complete the Association's 18-month leadership development program, called the Practical Leadership Action Network (PLAN). When members were challenged to find a "passion" project that would put their leadership skills to work, Campbell chose Sumter County Parks and Recreation.



Case Study Sumter County

The long-term vision includes ball fields used by area schools, a renovated community center and a new pavilion. The basketball court would be resurfaced and fenced. Campbell said he envisions a place for barbecues and family reunions.

Next on the "to do" list are a detailed plan for improvements and securing funds. To that end, he is in contact with the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) and engineering firms.

In the short term, the park is already much improved. Volunteers and commissioners themselves, with some county staff, have teamed up. With the help of the county's insurer, the ACCA Liability Self-Insurance Fund, dangerous equipment was identified and removed. The grass is cut regularly, and litter doesn't stay on the ground for long.

Look a little closer, and you can see that the community's civic infrastructure – sort of a power grid of human connections -- is growing stronger too. It's almost as though the work so far has been a team-building exercise to get from "somebody ought to do something" to "we can do something."

"You need everybody working together," Campbell said. "That's what it's going to take for this park." ■

Teenagers as engaged community stakeholders

Finding a way to engage local residents has been the key to some of the Alabama's most successful industry recruitment efforts. But how can economic development leaders ensure citizens see themselves as real stakeholders in the community's economic future?

Lawrence County Commissioner Joey Hargrove says it starts by engaging people in the process at a young age. That is why he created an extended county government simulation involving grades 9-12 at East Lawrence High School.

The recent closure of the county's economic engine, International Paper, has impacted almost every person in the tight-knit community. "We've got some smart kids at East Lawrence," Hargrove said. "They understand

what is going on, and know what they'd like to see happening in their community."

As a regular substitute teacher at the school, Hargrove recognizes the importance of collaboration and community involvement first-hand. "I want these students to know they can't just change the world by themselves," he said. "They have to do it together."

There will be a big dose of reality, because Hargrove is developing the



Case Study Lawrence County

topics that students will consider straight from county commission agendas. The student body will grapple with animal control, solid waste issues, infrastructure, and the county's annual budget – all vital components of industry recruitment.

As part of the 2016 class of the Practical Leadership Action Network (PLAN), Hargrove chose this initiative as his PLAN "passion" project. He hopes the project will take "diversity" beyond its usual definitions to include teenagers, who are often not part of the conversation.

Hargrove said the program has support from his children, who are students at East Lawrence. "They said some of their friends were interested in politics, so we're going to let them see how local government works." ■



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Pictured, from left: Dean Calvert, Blount; Marcus Campbell, Sumter; Robert Ham, Lee; David Quarker, Escambia; Tommie Armistead, Sumter; Michael Thompson, Marengo; Allen Armstrong, Blount; Randy Vest, Morgan; Frederick Kennedy, Pickens; Bobby Everett, Winston; Douglas Sinquefield, Houston; Bobby Burch, Lawrence; and Tucker Dorsey, Baldwin. (Not pictured: George Bowman, Jefferson; Charles "Chic" Gary, Dale; Joey Hargrove, Lawrence; Emmett Owen, Cleburne; and Carolyn Parker, Etowah.)

88th Annual ACCA Convention

Leadership program nears completion

In 2013, the Association staff began to explore the benefits of sponsoring a leadership program that would bring county commissioners from across the state together to build upon their leadership skills. The idea was to take commissioners entering their second-term of office, and give them additional tools to become even more impactful county leaders. Now, almost 2 years since its inception, the first class of the Association's Practical Leadership Action Network (PLAN) will be recognized at the upcoming 2016 Association of County Commissions of Alabama (ACCA) Annual Convention.

The 18-month PLAN program, directed by the ACCA staff, is designed to develop practical and service-oriented leadership skills in its participants so they can become change makers in their communities and beyond. Through various events, seminars, and social outings, the PLAN participants build

meaningful relationships with other county and state officials – all with the goal of creating a larger sphere of influence for these rising leaders.

The PLAN 2016 class recently completed its last event – a wrap-up retreat where participants updated each other on their final assignment, the development and implementation of a community "passion" project in their home counties. This project is just one of several program activities designed to challenge participants to move past their comfort zones and put their leadership skills to work.

Over the course of the program, PLAN 2016 leaders learned about the specialized functions of county government, became more actively involved in the Association's affiliate organizations and its governing boards, and enhanced their leadership skills during instructional sessions. Class members also gained additional hands-on experience advocating for

News You Can Use

the best interests of county government at the state and federal level.

“My participation in the PLAN program gave me an opportunity to build relationships with commissioners from other parts of the state, that I otherwise wouldn’t have met. It has also been very helpful to share our experiences and support one another in our efforts to make a difference,” said Baldwin County Commissioner Tucker Dorsey. “It is easy to see the similarity between Baldwin County issues compared to Lee County, but we also see the challenges in counties like Sumter that have completely different demographics. Each of us wants to build a safer community with greater opportunities for our friends and neighbors that have let us serve as commissioners.”

Some of the group’s accomplishments include the following:

“
Each of us wants to build a safer community with greater opportunities for our friends and neighbors that have let us serve as commissioners.

*Tucker Dorsey
Commissioner, Baldwin Co.*

- Brainstorming and drafting a mission statement for the PLAN program
- Lobbying at the State House in Montgomery
- Participating in lobbying activities in Washington, D.C.

- Engaging in team exercises and leadership training from a nationally recognized facilitator
- Increasing knowledge and involvement in the ACCA’s affiliate organizations
- Developing and implementing new community projects in home county

An informational session will be held at the upcoming ACCA Annual Convention for those commissioners interested in being part of the PLAN 2018 class. The next PLAN class is open to those commissioners entering their second-term of office in November 2016. To participate, commissioners are required to have completed the Level I program of the Alabama Local Government Training Institute. ***For more information about PLAN 2018, contact Terri Reynolds or Donna Key at 334-263-7594.*** ■

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Key Dates 2016 ACCA Annual Convention

June 24 – Deadline to submit **awards nominations/applications** (Excellence in County Government Rural/Urban, Outstanding Contribution to County Government, Tenure in Office, Memorials)

July 15 – Last day to register for **Fishing Expedition** on Aug. 15

July 29 – Last day of **early registration** (\$200 per person for county officials and staff)

July 30 – **Late registration** begins (\$225 per person for county officials and staff)

Aug. 1 – Last day to cancel convention registration and receive a **refund**

Aug. 5 – Last day to register (\$10) for **Convention Golf Tournament** on Aug. 15

Note: **ONE** non-county spouse or guest may attend the convention at no additional charge.

88th Annual ACCA Convention

Setting the Stage for the Future

What will the State of Alabama look like in the year 2040? Where will people live? What will our major areas of employment be? What social issues will affect our state? How do we begin to prepare county government

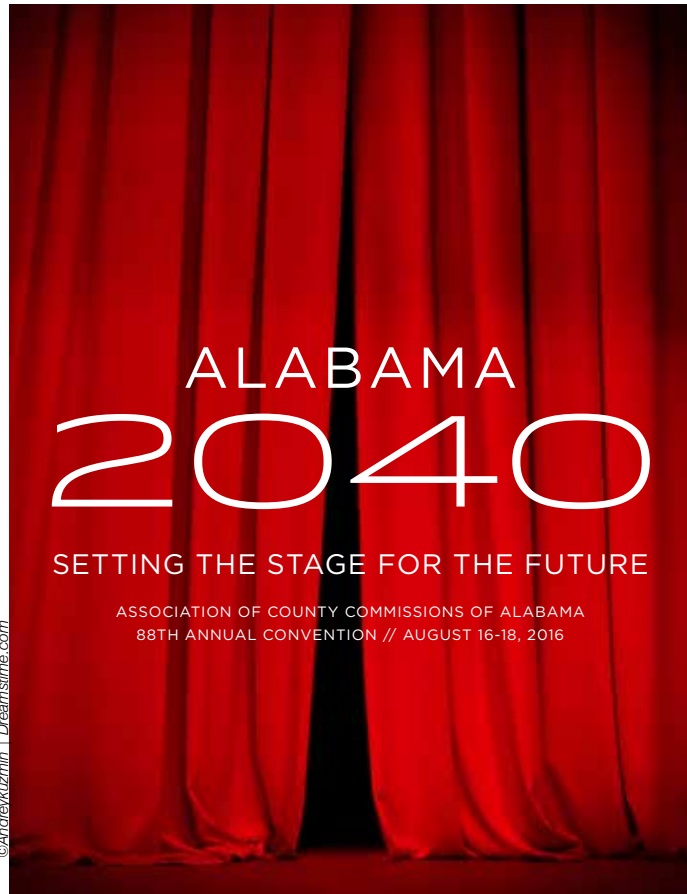
today to take care of our citizens 20 years from now? Those questions and many more will be addressed during the opening general session of the ACCA Annual Convention, Aug. 16-18 in Orange Beach, Ala.

County officials and staff leaders will once again find the ACCA Annual Convention to be a smart investment that will pay dividends for their home county and all Alabama counties.

Here are a few reasons to attend the 2016 convention:

- Continuing education credits for county staff members to maintain professional certifications
- Education credits for commissioners in the Alabama Local Government Training Institute's graduate program
- Legal advice and guidelines for implementing 2016's new laws properly and effectively
- Saving taxpayer money and improving county services with information gathered in the Exhibit Showcase (Compare products, services and costs with 80+ vendors under one roof)
- Face-to-face conversations with representatives of up to a dozen state and federal government agencies that interact with counties every day
- Best practices from other counties in Alabama
- Invaluable informal networking with colleagues who are working for the betterment of county government

Register online at www.alabamacounties.org



Leading the Unified Voice of County Government

One of the most important elements of the ACCA Annual Convention is electing the county commissioners who lead the unified voice of county government – the Association's Officers, Board of Directors and Legislative Committee.



It is an honor and a responsibility because their decisions

shape and guide the organization's activities, including the legislation that counties work to pass or kill at the State House.

Candidates for these positions must be willing to actively and regularly participate in ACCA endeavors. Board and legislative committee members are called upon to meet several times a year and travel to Montgomery on short notice during the legislative session.

ACCA's bylaws also specify that board members must be in full compliance with statutory requirements for the Alabama Local Government Training Institute's commissioner education program.

Additional details, forms and other information are available online at www.alabamacounties.org/candidates

» Key Dates for Electing ACCA Vice President & Minority Director

Elected by ACCA's Statewide Membership

July 5 – Last day candidates for these positions (vice president and minority director) can submit form to be considered by the Nominating Committee

Aug. 2 – Nominating Committee interviews candidates for vice president and minority director at ACCA headquarters

Aug. 17 – Nominating Committee meets

Aug. 18 – Membership votes during ACCA Business Session

» Key Dates for Electing ACCA Board of Directors & Legislative Committee

Elected by the 12 ACCA Districts

Aug. 5 – Last day candidates for these positions (board of directors and legislative committee) can submit form to be listed on their district's official ballot

Aug. 18 – Voting in District Caucuses during ACCA Business Session

Election questions? Contact Donna Key
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Professional Member



Bowman works to improve services for veterans

When 25 influential Alabamians were needed for an effort to improve services for military veterans, it is no surprise that County Commissioner George F. Bowman answered the call.

Bowman, who represents District 1 in Jefferson County, retired from the U.S. Army as a two-star general and has family on active duty today.

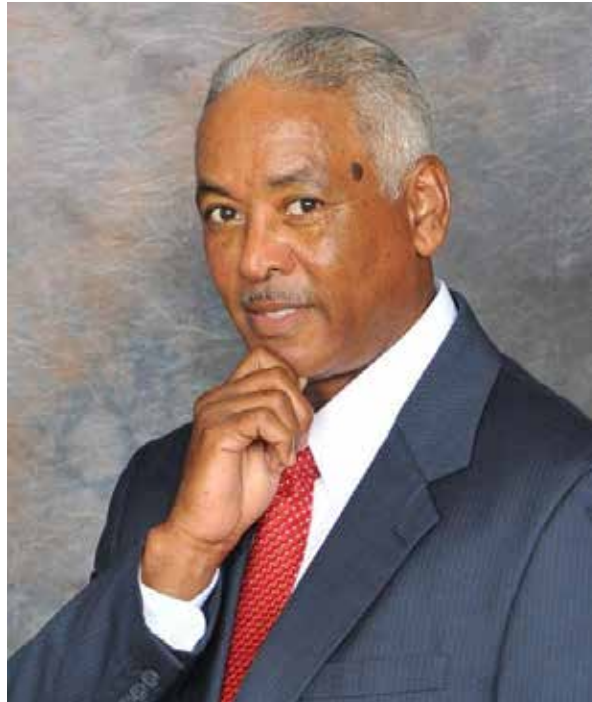
His involvement with the MyVA Operation Entrust Community Board also means that the county voice is part of these important conversations.

"These same veterans are part of my constituency; they are citizens of the county," Bowman said. "I wear both hats."

Many states have formed similar MyVA Community Boards. "It's a collaborative effort for everyone to try to address all veterans' issues – healthcare, homelessness, PTSD and job training," he explained. "We are attempting to holistically address as many issues as we can."

Alabama's board is co-chaired by retired U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Clyde Marsh, commissioner of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, and Toby Warren, founder of the National Leadership Congress. Board members include representatives of numerous veterans' service organizations and government agencies.

One of the board's key functions is to connect the many different nonprofits and community groups that are working on veterans' issues. The board has already conducted community forums in Birmingham and Opelika, and the next one is scheduled for August 26 in Tuscaloosa.



George Bowman

» *MyVA Operation Entrust Community Forum in Tuscaloosa*

4:30 p.m., Aug. 26, 2016
River Market
1900 Jack Warner Parkway

Veterans and the public are invited

The most pressing issues are usually healthcare, affordable housing and jobs, Bowman said, and that holds true regardless of whether a veteran served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War or more recent conflicts.

He believes that groups working at the local level can make a significant impact. For example, the Jefferson County Commission has provided grant support for a project that will address two of the big needs head on. A grand opening is expected this summer for a facility that will offer newly renovated apartments for almost 100 veterans in conjunction with job skills training and placement services.

Bowman is in his second term on the county commission. He has been active in the Association, having served as minority director and on the board of directors. Bowman is also in the first class of the commissioner leadership network PLAN and has completed the Level I commissioner education program of the Alabama Local Government Training Institute. In addition, he is a member of

the Veterans and Military Services Committee of the National Association of Counties (NACo).

Bowman said he would be glad to hear from his colleagues around the state who share an interest in this issue. He can be reached at 205-214-5507 (office) or bowmang@jccal.org.

For him, taking care of veterans is close to his heart. "I have a vested interest; I've got children and grandchildren still serving. I've got skin in the game," he said. "Military service runs in our family very deep." ■

'Stepping Up' to reduce mental illness

By Nastassia Walsh, MA
Program Manager
National Association of Counties (NACo)

Nationally, more than two million adults with serious mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia are booked into county jails every year. The prevalence of people with mental illnesses in jails is three to six times higher than for the general population. Once incarcerated, people with mental illnesses tend to stay longer and, upon release, are at a higher risk of returning than individuals without these illnesses. Despite individual counties' tremendous efforts to address this problem, they are often thwarted by significant obstacles, such as coordinating multiple systems and operating with minimal resources, especially in more rural counties.

In recognition of this critical issue, the National Association of Counties (NACo), the Council of State Governments Justice Center, and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation have come together to lead a national initiative to help advance counties' efforts to reduce the number of adults with

mental illnesses in jails. With support from the U.S. Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Stepping Up initiative builds on the many innovative and proven practices being implemented in counties across the country.

As part of this initiative, county officials are being asked to pass a resolution or proclamation pledging to work with behavioral health and law enforcement leaders, people with mental illnesses and their advocates, and other stakeholders to establish their own initiatives to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in their jails. More than 250 counties across the country have passed resolutions or proclamations to participate in the initiative, including eight counties in Alabama. NACo is grateful to Autauga, Blount, Elmore, Etowah, Jefferson, Lowndes, Mobile and Montgomery counties for participating in this important initiative!

Alabama counties have really "stepped up" to take on this important issue. In addition to passing resolutions to participate in the national initiative, many counties

have developed their own local initiatives to address mental illness in their jails.

For example, the four-county (Autauga, Elmore, Lowndes and Montgomery counties) River Region Healthy Minds Network (HMN) developed and implemented the Post-Incarceration Case Manager demonstration project in April 2014 to serve residents of Montgomery and Lowndes counties leaving jail or prison with a diagnosed severe mental illness. In the first year, one case manager served more than 40 clients with a recidivism rate of 2.5 percent compared to the typical rate for this population which is 56.7 percent. The estimated savings

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to the jails combined was nearly \$800,000. As a result, the City and County of Montgomery are investing an additional \$100,000 to hire three more case managers.

Since joining the initiative, the HMN has begun offering Mental Health First Aid training (an 8-hour course that teaches individuals how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses) more frequently and reliably in the community, and 19 local law enforcement officers completed Crisis Intervention Team training. HMN held a mental health conference in March and was selected to participate as a regional team in the National Summit on Reducing the Prevalence of Individuals with Mental Illnesses in Jails in Washington, D.C. in April.

After attending the summit, Daniel Harris, vice chairman of the Montgomery County Commission, remarked, "As a commissioner, my immediate goal is to identify and implement more effective and efficient ways

THE STEPPINGUP INITIATIVE

of addressing mental illness in Montgomery County. However, long term, I'd like to see reform regarding this topic statewide and nationally."

Commissioner

Carnell McAlpine from Lowndes County added, "As a commissioner from the second-poorest county in Alabama, I was surprised to learn that major cities and counties with millions of people have the same problems. That was enlightening to me and shows that we all have to work together to find solutions to our universal problems. We have to take care of everyone in our counties, including those with mental illness."

Elmore County Commissioner Stephanie Daniels Smoke also attended the summit. "I am thankful for Elmore County being given the opportunity to participate. It was informative and resourceful, but the statistics surrounding the issue were disheartening. We have much work to accomplish the goals that we need to achieve in Elmore County and the River Region. However, mental health is an issue near and dear to my heart, and I'm dedicated to coming up with solutions for the region," she stated.

This is just one example of the significant work that is happening in Alabama counties to address this challenge. We know that many more counties are starting or enhancing their efforts to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in their jails. We would love to hear from you!

Want to get started in your county? Through Stepping Up, resources such as webinars, planning exercises, case studies and research are available to help guide counties of all sizes through this process. All of these resources are available on the Stepping Up website at www.StepUpTogether.org/Toolkit and more are being added regularly to assist county efforts.

We hope you will join us! To learn more about the Stepping Up initiative or to join the Call to Action, go to www.StepUpTogether.org or contact Nastassia Walsh, program manager at the National Association of Counties, at nwalsh@naco.org or 202.942.4289. ■

** Includes county resolutions received by NACo as of April 29, 2016. If you passed a resolution and are not included on this list, please send a copy of the resolution to Nastassia Walsh at nwalsh@naco.org.*



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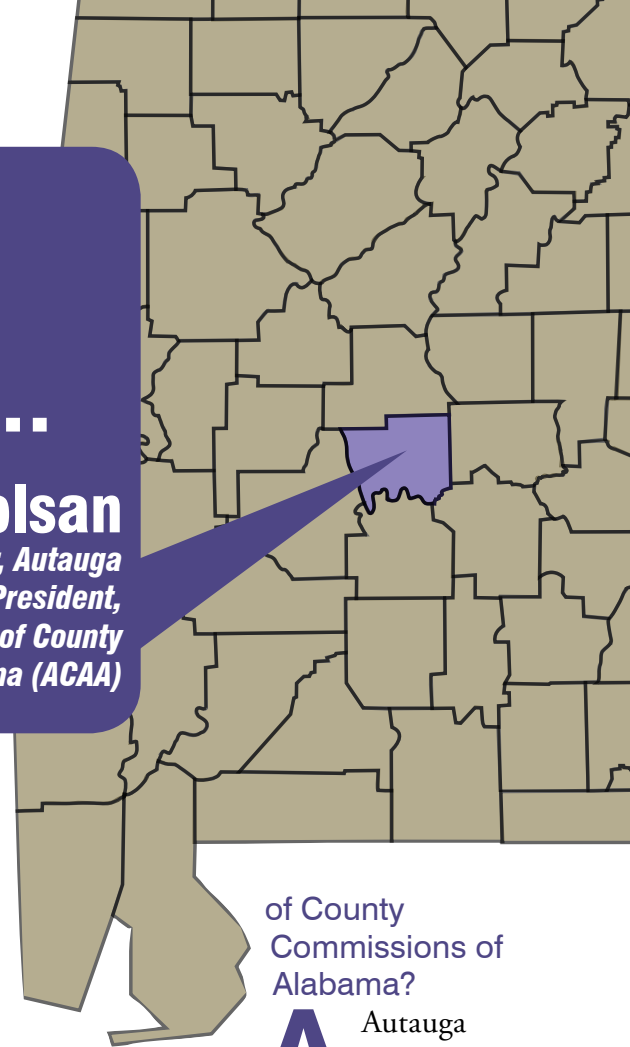
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A voice from Alabama's 67 counties...

Steve Golsan

Treasurer/Administrator, Autauga County, & 2015-16 President, Association of County Administrators of Alabama (ACAA)



Q What was your very first job?

A My first job out of college was as a staff accountant for Durr-Fillauer Medical Inc. My first job out of high school was electrical and HVAC work.

Q Alabama or Auburn or _____?

A Alabama

Q How long have you worked in county government?

A 14 years. I have served as the county administrator for Autauga County the whole time.

Q How do you describe your job to people who may not be familiar with county government?

A I tell them my job is to be responsible for the financial reporting, accounts payable, payroll, human resources and facilities management for the county. In actuality I spend most of my time as the complaint department, air conditioning man, dog catcher and leak fixer.

Q What is your biggest challenge as a county administrator?

A Trying to maintain the financial integrity of the county when the costs of providing the essential functions of the county government are escalating while revenue sources are not. Inflation really stands out when you look at the highway department, because road construction costs have doubled in the last 20 years, but it is a problem all over.

Q What's one way your county benefits from being active in the Association

of County Commissions of Alabama?

A Autauga County

benefits by being in the Workers' Compensation Insurance Fund. This coverage is so important, and it is a real advantage to have something custom-tailored to the county environment.

Q How has the county's role in economic development changed during your years in local government?

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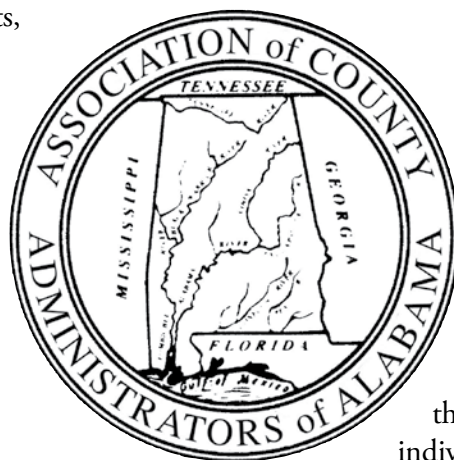
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A The county has become more involved in economic development over the years. Due to the competition for economic development projects, there has been a strong increase in the amount of incentives and tax abatements that are being offered to try and entice new industry to come into our county.

Q What is your best advice for establishing and maintaining good working relationships with your county commissioners?

A The best advice that I can give is to provide accurate and factual information to the commissioners so that they can

make informed decisions. Also, it is important to keep commissioners updated on current events so that “surprises” are kept to a minimum.



Q What are the biggest benefits of ACAA membership?

A As I have heard Mr. Brasfield state several times, there are only 67 individuals that do what we do in the state.

With the complexities and ongoing changes that we experience through new legislation and new GASB regulations, it is very beneficial to have the contacts with fellow administrators. We can assist each other in dealing with issues that may arise, because very rarely is there a

new problem. Somebody else has been through the same thing or has some good advice. Also of great value are the ongoing training and updates on current legislative activities that is provided by the staff of the ACCA.

Q What are some of the ACAA priorities for the coming year?

A I think the major priority of the ACAA is to focus on the continuing education of our members and to make sure that our members are updated on new legislative and regulatory changes that affect our counties.

Q What does it mean to Autauga County to be part of “67 counties, ONE voice”?

A More can be accomplished with a group effort than by working alone. ■

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