

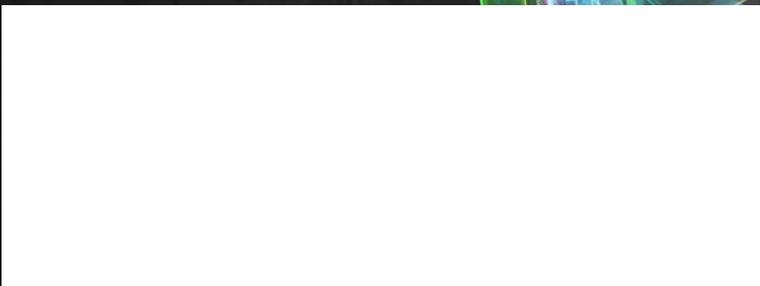
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COUNTY COMMISSION

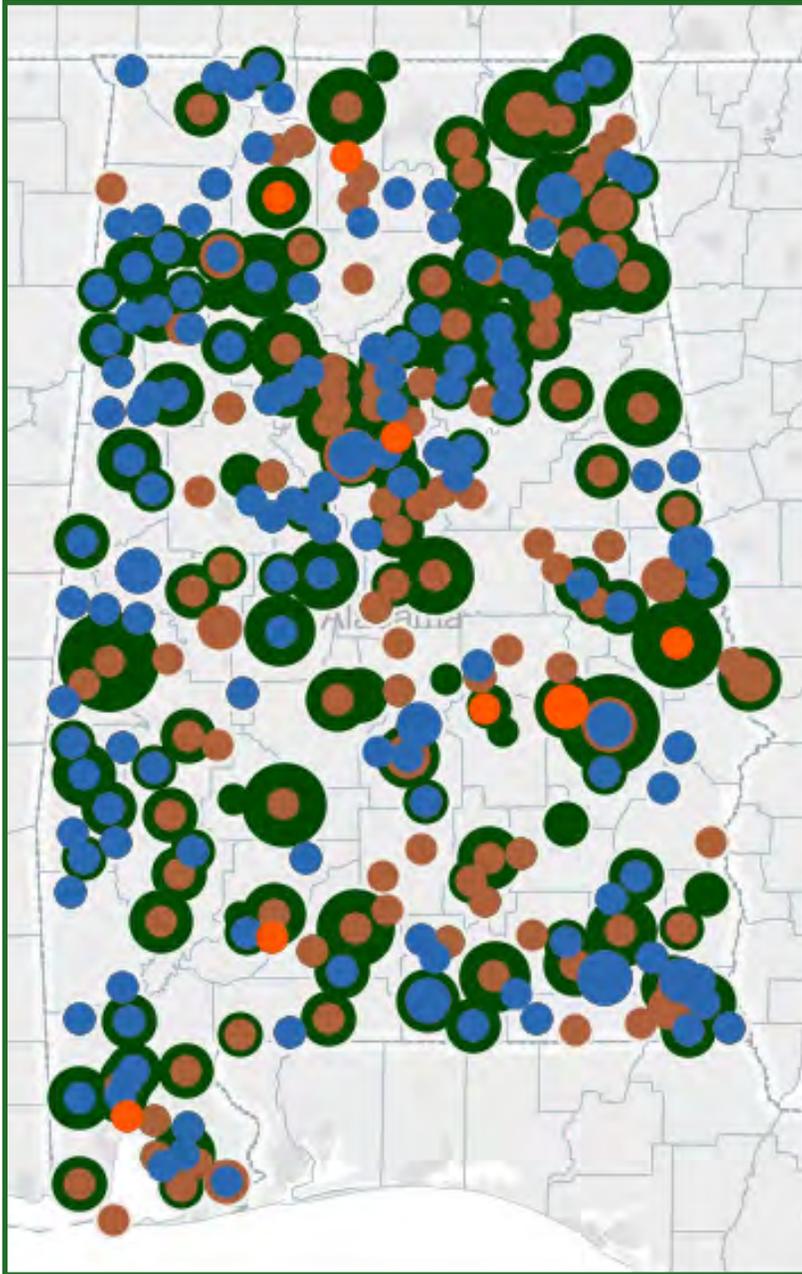
Volume 61, Number 2
April 2017



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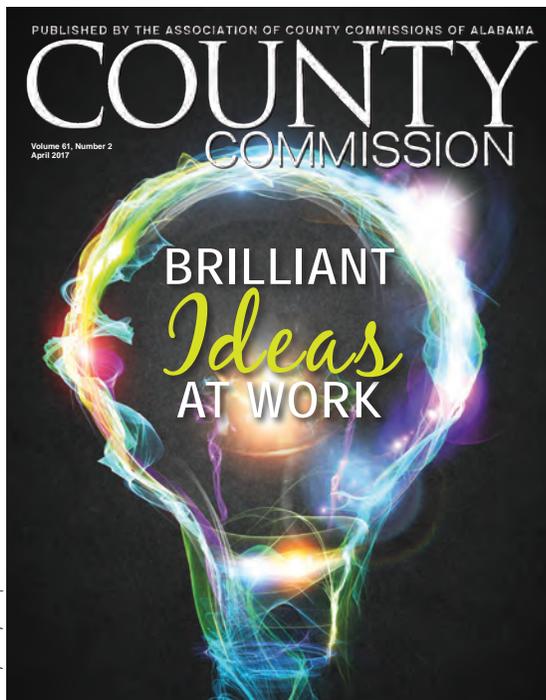
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in this issue

VOLUME 61, NUMBER 2



In honor of National County Government Month, County Commission magazine salutes the “Brilliant Ideas at Work” in Alabama’s 67 counties. From Madison County’s medical clinic for county employees to Blount County’s Facebook Live town hall meeting – Alabama is full of brilliant county leaders who are committed to improving the quality of life in their communities.



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from the cover...

Brilliant Ideas at Work	10
Blount County’s town hall meeting goes live	10
Converting ‘safety committee’ into an action verb	13
ECRT goes big on advertising.....	17
Employee clinic is win-win in Madison County	19
Dale County persists against litter.....	22
Safety coordinators collaborate on SIDP	22

news you can use...

Beyer: Federal red tape doubles project costs	25
Equipping You to Better Serve Your County	30
Ellis steps from the courthouse to the Statehouse	32
A passion for developing leaders.....	34
County Family Feature Unity Despite Differences	36

point of view...

President’s Perspective	4
<i>Turning obstacles into new possibilities</i>	
The County Line	6
<i>Leadership will be needed to address Alabama’s problem with dam safety</i>	

in every issue...

A voice from Alabama’s 67 counties	39
<i>Amy Beard, Madison County</i>	

who we are...

2016-17 ACCA Board of Directors	42
ACCA Staff.....	42

President's PERSPECTIVE



Hon. Bill Strickland
President

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bill Strickland'.

Turning obstacles into new possibilities

**You are the most
significant driver of
innovation**

Imagine sitting down to work at your desk tomorrow morning, only to find all of your office supplies missing. No paper. No stapler. No printer or computer. Would you head home for the day, or would you improvise?

It's difficult to imagine, but there was a time when there was no such thing as a sheet of paper or a stapler to hold all the pieces together. There was no such thing as a printing press, and certainly no computers. But today, doing the massive work of county government would feel virtually impossible without them.

The amenities we enjoy – take for granted even – are all the result of one word: innovation. It always starts with a question – a question that, when asked, appears to have no answer. But inevitably, there is someone that answers the clarion call to look past the obstacles to see the possibilities.

It all boils down to people, because people are the most significant drivers of innovation. The true innovators of the world know they can't always play it safe. They know it requires doing the homework and having the courage to take a chance without fear of failure.

That's no secret to us. Innovation takes place in the halls of county government each and every day. For decade after decade, county leaders and employees have overcome numerous hurdles – from understaffing and budget cuts to inadequate technology and limited local power – by identifying innovative and creative solutions to address the needs and challenges they face on a daily basis.

This issue of the magazine is filled with examples of county innovation right here in Alabama.

Whether it's improving healthcare access for county employees or promoting county initiatives on social media, the programs highlighted here demonstrate how our counties are striving continuously to serve their constituents more efficiently and cost-effectively.

Our Association is no different. In the last 30 years alone, this organization has developed program after program that have yielded millions of dollars in savings for county governments. The joint bid program was the brainchild of county engineers who decided that there had to be a better, more efficient way for counties to purchase items like heavy equipment and corrugated metal piping. The program has now expanded to offer regional, pre-need contracts for debris removal as a result of the engineers' hard work and commitment.

The Association's self-insurance funds also provide a service that is tailored to the needs of Alabama counties. The funds now return millions to counties in refunds each year, which can undoubtedly be attributed to the input and leadership of county employees and officials who provide their time and expertise to serve on the insurance boards.

And every year, for as long as I can remember, county leaders in Alabama have converged on the Association office to determine innovative ways to improve county government through the legislative process. Those efforts have resulted in laws that have greatly improved local government operations. The Limited Self-Governance Act is a prime example of county innovation. Almost one third of Alabama counties are now creating local programs

to address problems like unregulated junkyards, unsanitary sewage conditions and other nuisances. Not to mention the numerous statewide and local constitutional amendments that have improved county operations – the most recent being the enactment of Amendment 4 which will open up administrative solutions to many of the problems confronting counties on a daily basis.

Alabama also received national recognition when it established a statewide fee on all devices that can access 911 and, in the process, provided stable, long-term 911 funding for every county. Likewise, the innovative Certified Local Emergency Manager program has provided salary subsidies at the local level for EMA directors who meet specified qualifications and continuing education requirements. And the salary

subsidy program for county engineers and assistant engineers has led to our state becoming a national voice on transportation issues because we can now “grow” engineers who spend

and this year is no different. The Association is supporting legislation this session that would give us a stronger voice in the Employees’ Retirement System, and the ATRIP-2

proposal is clearly one of the most important pieces of legislation the Association has pushed in years. Its long-term impact would benefit our children, and our children’s children. And it is happening, in large part, due to the persistent and creative efforts of county leaders.

So the next time your county is faced with an obstacle, think about a time before paper, before staplers, before printers and computers; then ask yourself: what now?

Because at the end of the day, innovation all boils down to you – your resistance to seeing and doing things differently or your openness to new possibilities. ■

***It’s difficult to imagine,
but there was a time when
there was no such thing as a
sheet of paper or a stapler to
hold all the pieces together.
There was no such thing
as a printing press,
and certainly no computers.***

their entire careers in county government.

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Sonny Brasfield

Leadership will be needed to address Alabama's problem with dam safety

Recent emergency in California reinforces urgency for action in this state

It's a long way from Oroville to Montgomery. Almost 2,500 miles to be exact.

But it didn't take long for the news of the evacuation of almost 200,000 people to travel the distance from Northern California and make us stand at attention back in mid-February. When the nation's tallest dam was in peril – as its spillway eroded under pounding rainstorms and those below the dam were threatened with a 30-foot wall of water – my thoughts instantly returned to failed efforts to establish a dam safety program here in Alabama.

On the heels of the breach of a small dam in Shelby County, a few organizations came together back in 2014 and kicked around the idea of passing legislation to establish a dam inspection program in Alabama. As the only state in the nation without some kind of program, the reaction to the Oroville threat was predictable and appropriate.

Yet, today, there is no statewide inventory of dams in Alabama, no standards for quality construction and no requirement for regular evaluation. Yep, it's a long way from Oroville to Montgomery.

Back in February, The Montgomery Advertiser reported on the state's unfortunate distinction, citing several sources to make the point. The American Society of Civil Engineers stated in 2015 that information on Alabama dams is "incomplete" and a similar evaluation from the Association of State Dam Safety Officials pointed out that the "condition of most dams in Alabama is unknown," the newspaper said.

In fact, only the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has any decent information on the

Alabama situation, the story reported. The Corps estimates that Alabama has more than 2,200 dams and that only 2 percent – or less than 50 of them – are inspected. And those undergo review only because they meet federal regulatory tests and are subject to federally-required annual inspections and the development of emergency action plans.

The threat in Oroville was real. But tragedy was avoided as the dam eventually held its ground, despite significant damage to both the main and bare slope spillways. As the tallest dam in America, the aftermath of a complete failure is almost beyond our imaginations.

A couple of days later, my phone rang early one morning and the familiar voice on the other end of the phone began to express concern about Alabama's lack of review of the dams that dot our state's landscape. As both a state and national leader among county engineers, his voice always demands attention with those who shape public policy. And he was concerned.

Together we recounted that unsuccessful effort back in 2014, a movement pushed along initially because of a dam breach in his area. As the unified voice for county government in Alabama, the Association and a team of county engineers were participants in that initiative. Honestly, we failed to take on a real leadership role for a variety of reasons. And, without a catalyst for change, the legislative effort failed to gain any momentum.

Right now, in the midst of the 2017 legislative session, it seems a bit distracting to start thinking about a piece of legislation that isn't even on the drawing board. Admittedly, the issues surrounding counties right now

– new revenue for roads and bridges, a stronger voice on the Retirement Systems of Alabama Board of Control and the never-ending prison crisis – must stay in our cross-hairs for the moment.

Before we know it, however, this session will conclude and then it will be time to turn our focus and expertise to a new set of priorities. There will be new problems; with solutions that can only be identified through the leadership of an organization which has demonstrated, over and over again, that it can effect real change.

The 2014 effort at establishing a dam safety program was derailed for a variety of reasons; none of which should be strong enough to keep Alabama and its citizens in such a disadvantaged position for much longer.

There will be money to be made on the passage of this bill. Clearly a group, or groups, will be responsible for paying the invoice when the inspections take place, and someone will be on the receiving end of those

The Corps estimates that Alabama has more than 2,200 dams and that only 2 percent – or less than 50 of them – are inspected.

payments. Those facts will make passage more difficult.

Some state agency must assume the responsibility for coordinating and administering the program.

There will be costs associated with that effort as well, along with administrative duties. Those facts will make the passage more difficult.

There will be some who will be interested in looking for new ways to assign blame – and financial responsibility – if required inspections are not conducted or if identified repairs are not made. Those facts will make the passage more difficult.

And there will be those who will work to ensure that, somehow, one group or another gains or loses power in this new process. Those facts will also make the passage more difficult.

None of those facts change the most important “take away” from the evacuation a few weeks ago. It might be a long way from Oroville to Montgomery, but bad news travels very, very quickly. ■

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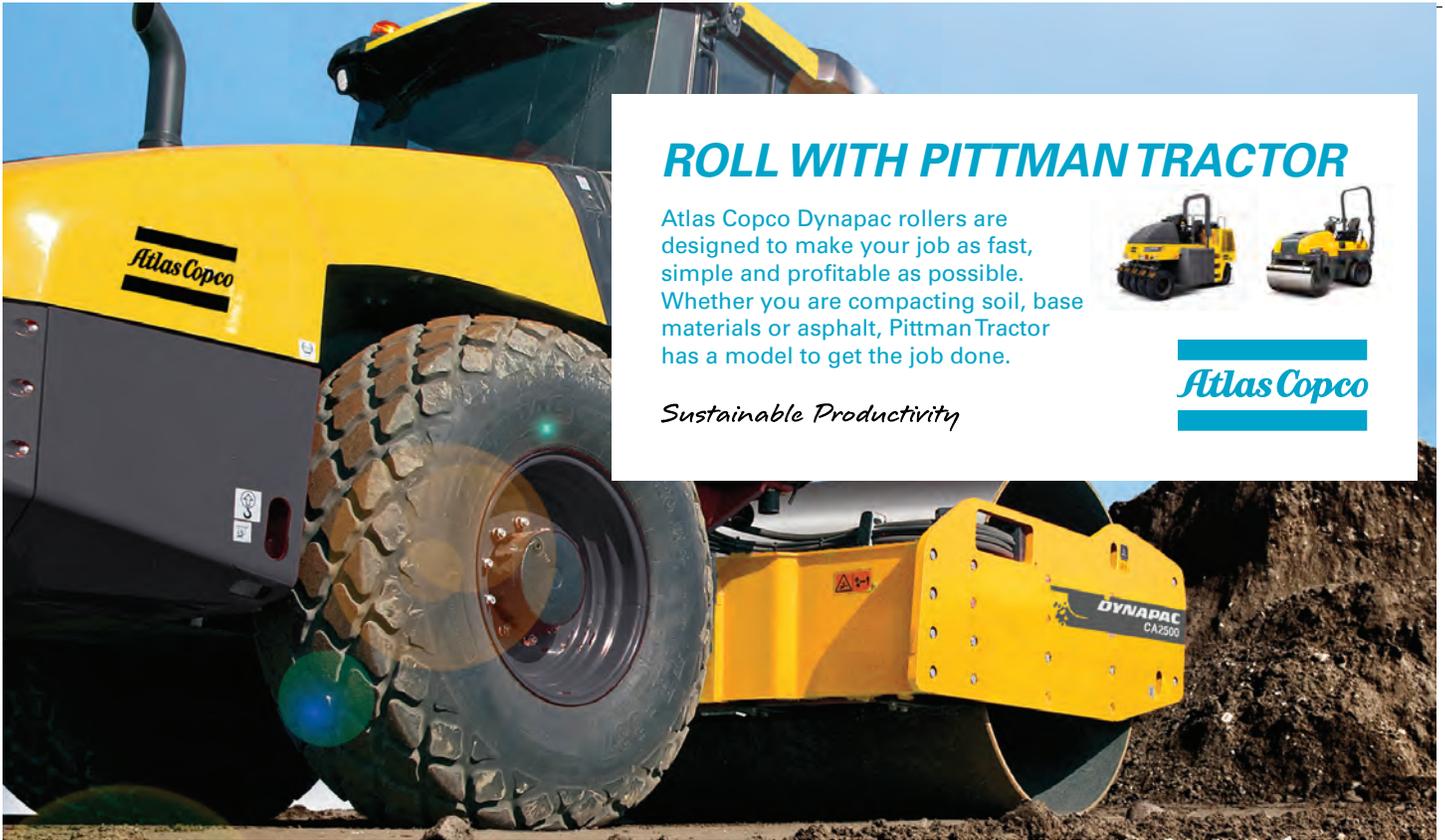


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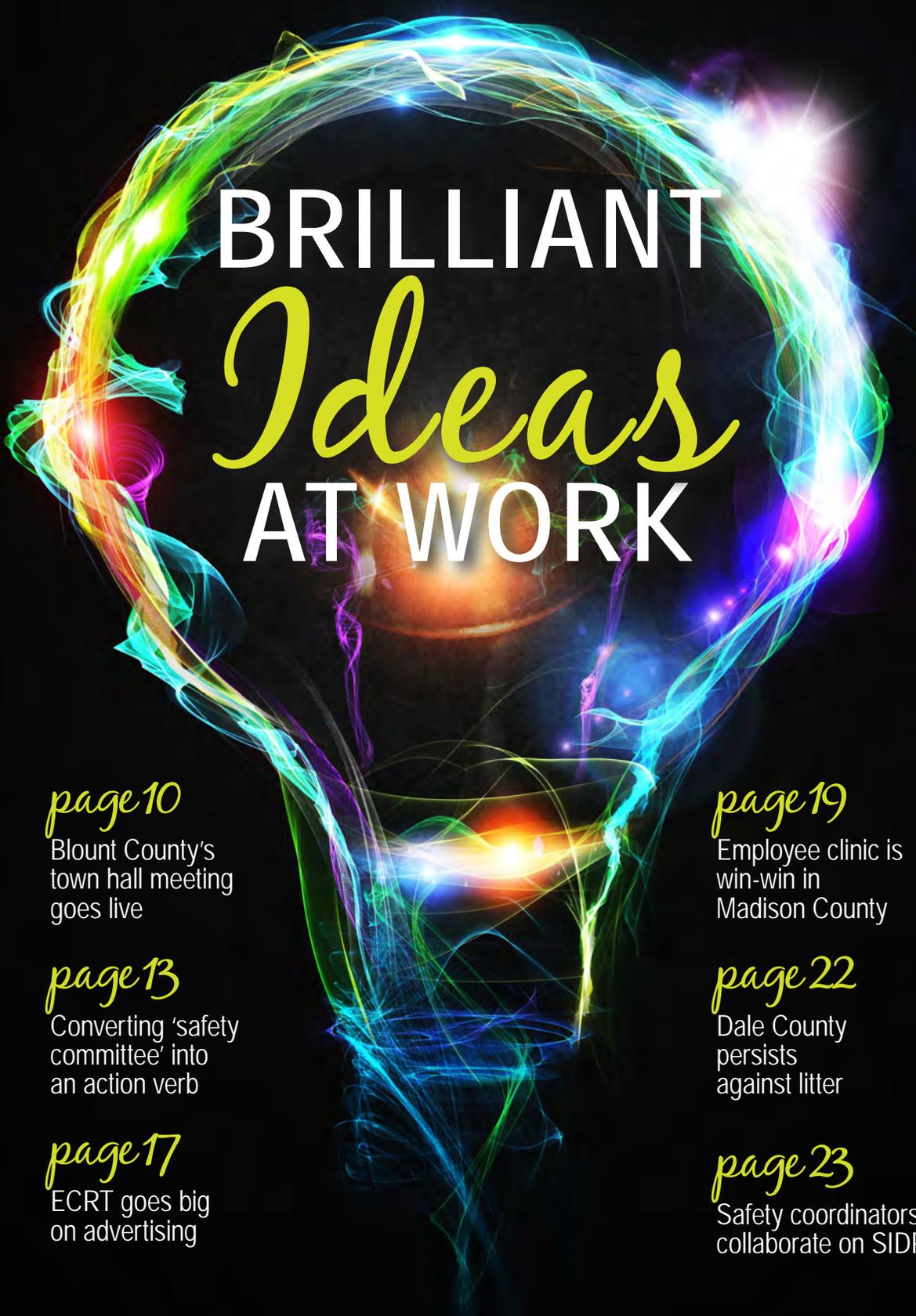
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BRILLIANT *Ideas* AT WORK

page 10

Blount County's town hall meeting goes live

page 13

Converting 'safety committee' into an action verb

page 17

ECRT goes big on advertising

page 19

Employee clinic is win-win in Madison County

page 22

Dale County persists against litter

page 23

Safety coordinators collaborate on SIDP

“I’m always amazed by counties’ ability to find a way forward. Counties overcome complex challenges, provide essential services to residents, save taxpayers money and constantly do more with less.”

Those are the words of Bryan Desloge, president of the National Association of Counties (NACo), who has chosen to focus his presidential initiative – and the 2017 celebration of National County Government Month – on recognizing innovations and sharing best practices.

He calls them Brilliant Ideas at Work, and there are plenty of examples right here in Alabama. There must be – because counties accomplish so much for so many, working with resources that are all too scarce.



What are the characteristics of Brilliant Ideas at Work? Are they unique? Sometimes. The wheel did have to be invented, and you could say the same about Simplified Sellers Use Tax remittance. But there is brilliance too in taking inspiration from another county’s success or in making the most of something that seems routine.

Bottom line, the brilliant part is what Desloge would call “finding a way forward” despite countless challenges. And counties in Alabama do that every single day.

Editor’s Note:

This month, County Commission magazine is saluting a few of the Brilliant Ideas at Work in Alabama counties. The Brilliant Ideas on these pages are surely just the tip of the iceberg. Undoubtedly, there are many more. We would love to hear about Brilliant Ideas at Work in your county! Please email us at sgowan@alabamacounties.org.

Blount County’s town hall meeting goes live

Last fall things were coming down to the wire for the Moving Blount County Forward initiative.

The coalition had been working for months to secure support for a 1-cent sales tax to benefit county and municipal infrastructure, public schools and public safety. County voters would decide the issue in a referendum on the same ballot as a presidential election predicted to generate massive turnout.

Advocates were not satisfied that extensive community meetings and other communication efforts had been sufficient.

“Even with 30 town hall meetings, we were only reaching a small part of the population,” said Zac Marsh, county administrator.

And then came the brilliant idea. What about a virtual town hall meeting? Citizens wouldn’t have to go out of their way to attend an event at a fixed time and location. The meeting could go to them via social media.

“It blew my mind,” said Commissioner Dean Calvert. “I said I’m willing to do anything we can to

get the information out as efficiently as possible.”

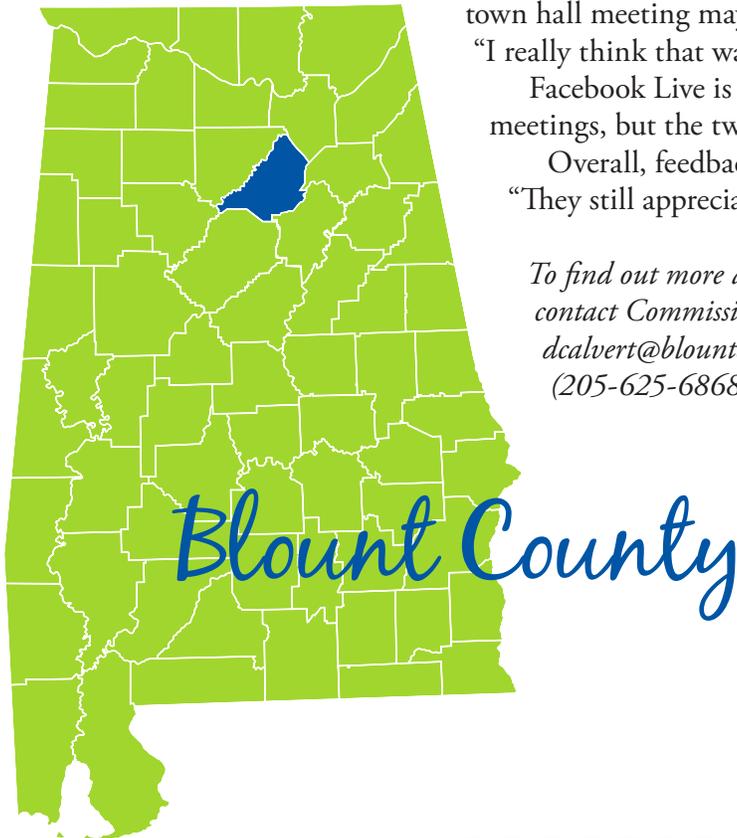
Next thing he knew, it was the Sunday afternoon before Election Day. Chris Green, the probate judge and commission chairman, had the county school superintendent and Calvert over to his house for a half-hour conversation about the 1-cent tax.

The hardware was pretty simple – a Samsung tablet and \$100 microphone from Best Buy. But it was enough to livestream their conversation to more than a thousand viewers using Facebook Live.

“Within a few days, we had something like 7,000 views,” Marsh said.

The referendum passed with 57 percent support from voters, and the virtual





town hall meeting may have been what put them over the top. “I really think that was the push to get the tax passed,” Calvert said. Facebook Live is no replacement for face-to-face community meetings, but the two work well together, he said.

Overall, feedback was positive – even from opponents. “They still appreciated the fact that we did it,” Marsh said. ■

To find out more about these Brilliant Ideas at Work in Blount County, contact Commissioner Dean Calvert (205-625-6868 // dcalvert@blountcountyal.gov) or Administrator Zac Marsh (205-625-6868 x #3234 // zmarsh@blountcountyal.gov).

Continuing the conversation

Communication strategy was key to the success of the Moving Blount County Forward referendum, and that has sparked another brilliant idea.

Commissioner Dean Calvert had stuck his neck out to rally support for the 1-cent sales tax. On election night, as much as he may have wanted to savor the win, his thoughts turned to next steps.

“It hit me,” said Calvert, a second-term Republican. “We’ve got to make this work.”

Proponents of the tax increase discussed options to increase transparency and accountability, and the “1-cent working for you” campaign was born.

At an estimated \$1.5 million annually, county roads and bridges are the biggest beneficiaries of the tax increase, and Calvert said questions started coming in immediately about when work would begin.

As the construction season cranks up, a large sign at each job site will inform Blount countians exactly which road improvements are made possible by that new cent. “I want to prove to them they’ve made a decision they can be proud of,” Calvert said.

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Converting ‘safety committee’ into an action verb

Brilliant ideas can come in all shapes and sizes, and some of the best success stories involve mastering the fundamentals, like Michael Jordan working to perfect his free-throw shot.

Most counties have safety committees, and safety committees have meetings. But how do you get the most out of this investment of time and personnel?

“There’s meetings to fulfill a requirement to meet, and there’s meetings to get something done,” said John Tucker, Cullman County’s safety director.

When safety committees work effectively, it’s almost a little bit magic, because the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. And here are a couple examples of the very real results that can be achieved by a hard-working safety committee.

Common Risk

At two safety committee meetings in a row last year, the road department’s representative reported concerns from county employees out at job sites who were confronted by dissatisfied citizens. A heated conversation about long-overdue road repair could potentially tip over into violence.

Representatives of other safety-sensitive departments, seated around the table, were quick to chime in with

their own incidents. The water department had experienced similar problems while working in areas of right-of-way that some residents have

county employees. That led the Sheriff’s Department to sponsor a half-day Verbal Defense course, open to all county departments.

A total of 91 county employees were trained in techniques to take control of a conversation and “de-escalate” a potential confrontation.

Feedback was positive across the board, from safety-sensitive departments and other areas. “These people deal with the public all the time,” Tucker said.



Before

In Cullman County, the sanitation department won praise for proactively initiating and implementing a project to improve inadequate access to above-ground fuel storage tanks. The old steps (above) were steep and narrow, and employees found it difficult to safely reach a port that must be checked routinely to monitor fuel levels. The department upgraded to a new catwalk, steps and railing (below) to reduce the risk of accidents.



After

Thinking Ahead

In meetings, committee members also report on Safety Improvement Activities, a broad category designed to encompass a wide range of action steps.

“If we are going to reduce loss due to injury or property damage, that requires action and not just recordkeeping or ‘after the fact’ investigations,” Tucker said. “We can in fact be proactive to reduce risk. However, being proactive requires action.”

At one meeting, the sanitation department reported that employees had built and installed new steps with handrails and a railing-enclosed platform so they would have better access when checking levels in aboveground fuel storage tanks.

claimed as part of their lawns.

The safety committee decided this was a serious risk affecting large numbers of their fellow

Photo credit: Cullman County



Cullman County

The upgrades were initiated – not because an outsider pointed a finger at the problem – but because employees noticed that the small ladder they’d been using made it hard to safely reach an important port. It was a routine task, and they saw a risk they could reduce.

“They brought pictures, and by the next meeting or two, the water department had done the same thing,” Tucker said.

The safety program is making progress in Cullman County, and Tucker said employees increasingly see safety as something that benefits them. The hard-working safety committee is right at the heart of putting the “active” in proactive. “I’m seeing the spark – the lightbulb go off,” he said. “If we look around, there are things we can do. ■

**“If we look around,
there are things
we can do.”**

To find out more about this Brilliant Idea at Work in Cullman County, contact John Tucker, safety director, at 256-775-4948 or jtucker@co.cullman.al.us.

As a result of information shared by the shared by the sanitation department with the Safety Committee, the water department identified a similar risk. At that department’s fuel tanks, employees installed this new wraparound catwalk with steps and railings.



Photo credit: Cullman County



This Safety Improvement Activity completed by the sanitation department involved painting the shop floor to identify walking aisles.



Photo credit: Cullman County

The water department uses this concrete platform for pressure-washing equipment, and one side of the platform is above grade. Employees recognized the uneven work surface as a safety risk, and as a result they installed this new yellow guardrail

SAFETY COMMITTEE TIPS

1. Meet regularly.
Cullman Co.'s committee meets every two months.
2. At every meeting, safety-sensitive departments report on their monthly departmental safety meetings.
3. In addition to reviewing recent incidents and corrective measures, committee members share proactive steps taken.
4. Ask departmental representatives on the committee to designate someone who can sub for them if necessary so that every safety-sensitive department participates in every committee meeting.



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ECRT goes big on advertising

Photo credit: Lora Weaver, Etowah County



Gadsden Regional Medical Center saw the value of advertising with Etowah County Rural Transportation right away and reserved the entire left side of the buses, said Director Lora Weaver.

Etowah County is the latest in a growing number of counties that have tapped into another revenue stream to help fund their rural transportation programs, which many residents rely on for rides to doctor's appointments, dialysis or the grocery store.

Riders typically pay a small fare, but the bulk of funding for these programs comes from the county and from federal grants. For Etowah County, riders pay a \$6 fare to utilize a program that, altogether, costs a little less than \$400,000 a year, said Lora Weaver, director of Etowah County Rural

Transportation (ECRT).

But since February of this year, there are advertisers paying to emblazon their messages on the soon-to-be 6 ECRT buses crisscrossing the county, from Ballplay in the east to Egypt in the west. "We're looking at approximately \$24,000 in revenue annually," Weaver said. "That helps a lot."

She started the project by checking with the Alabama

Department of Transportation (ALDOT), which

administers federal grants for rural transportation. After a request for proposals, the county commission contracted with someone locally

who handles ad sales, production and installation.

"He does all the work," Weaver said, noting that the county commission and ALDOT must approve all ads.

ECRT considered attaching brackets to the buses to hold small, interchangeable signs, but instead went big with wrap-style ads that advertisers purchase for a year. "It gives the advertiser a whole lot bigger area to catch people's attention – plus it brings in more revenue," Weaver said.

"Brilliant Ideas" are not necessarily unique. Sometimes the smartest move you can make is to replicate what works in other counties.

Weaver said she received excellent advice from other rural transportation programs that had already started advertising initiatives, such as Baldwin and Houston counties as well as the Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments, which serves Colbert, Lauderdale, Franklin, Marion and Winston counties.

She's also got an eye on the possibility of advertising inside the buses.

ECRT operates on a demand response basis, meaning that riders schedule ideally at least a day in advance for trips that can be 30-40 miles one way. Last year, ECRT made 2,367 trips during the busiest quarter (January-March).

"We use all the money we bring in to offset the cost to the county," Weaver said. ■

To find out more about this Brilliant Idea at Work in Etowah County, contact Lora Weaver, director of transportation, at 256-547-1014 or LWeaver@EtowahCounty.org.



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Employee Clinic is Win-Win in Madison County

With Madison County's new health clinic, employees are getting better care, and the county is saving \$14 million a year.

It sounds almost too good to be true, but it is real, and Dale Strong, a longtime commissioner, counts it among the highlights of his first four years as chairman.

"Like most Madison County businesses, we were faced with rising healthcare costs," Strong said. "I'm talking about jumping from \$11 million to \$25 million to cover county employees."

The county was also concerned about absenteeism, and many employees lacked a primary care physician.

For expertise, Strong turned to Huntsville Hospital Health Systems. Motivated by similar concerns, the hospital had established its own in-house medical clinic for employees in 1998 with positive results.

This led to the creation of the Local Government Employee Health Clinic, a partnership of Madison County, Huntsville Utilities and Huntsville Hospital Health Systems.

The clinic, conveniently located a couple miles from downtown, is under the same roof as a pharmacy and several other medical services.



Total clinic visits have increased every year. Visits numbered 1,861 in 2014, the clinic's first year of operation. Usage increased 66 percent in 2015, and with the continued growth in 2016, total visits came in at 3,643 for the year, almost double the first-year figures.

Dr. Joe Sharp serves as medical director with a total staff of five. Operating expenses are divided on a pro rata basis between the county and Huntsville Utilities.

One incentive for county employees and their families to use the clinic is a reduced copay. They can

see the doctor for \$15 as compared to \$35-40 per visit for other providers.

Sharp says one of the biggest benefits for employees is that the clinic works as a reliable and expedited entry point to specialists. "You can get lost in the medical system," he said, recounting one patient who came in the clinic with chest pains and arm pain. Before the day was out, he had a cardiologist and a stent in his heart, opening a 90 percent blockage.

Initially, most patients turned to the clinic only for urgent care, but more and more people are using it

Local Government Employee Health Clinic



- Open weekdays: 7pm - 5:25pm
- No appointment required
- Copay only \$15 per visit
- Open to county employees, their dependents over age 12 and retirees
- Partnership of Madison County Commission, Huntsville Hospital Health Systems, and Huntsville Utilities



for chronic care – meaning that many individuals with diabetes or high blood pressure are managing these conditions better.

“Like most Madison County businesses, we were faced with rising healthcare costs.”
- Chairman Dale Strong,
Madison County Commission

“The county has reaped some good savings,” said Andrea Rosler, vice president of human resources for Huntsville Hospital. She said there are cost savings when individuals go to the clinic for urgent care instead of the emergency room and when chronic conditions are managed more carefully. In addition, serious health problems can be detected earlier.

“You hear from the county and Huntsville Utilities that morale has improved because this clinic has been provided for employees,” said John Reynolds of Huntsville Hospital. “They couldn’t reduce it or get rid of it now because people feel very strongly about it.” ■

To find out more about this Brilliant Idea at Work in Madison County, contact Administrator Kevin Jones at 256-532-3492 or kjones@madisoncountyal.gov.

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Safety coordinators collaborate on SIDP

Safety Coordinator for an entire county is no small job, especially when you are wearing multiple hats.

The Safety Incentive Discount Program (SIDP) is no small project either, but there is a group of safety coordinators who are taking teamwork to a new level to ensure that they get the job done.

Through the SIDP, county members of the ACCA-sponsored self-insurance funds are eligible to earn cash incentives. To qualify, the county must complete that year's requirements, so the program works out to be a detailed year-long "to-do" list of safety improvements.

A good number of safety coordinators from the northern half of the state collaborate by meeting together several times a year to review program requirements



Cginspiration | Dreamstime.com

Through the SIDP, county members of the ACCA-sponsored self-insurance funds are eligible to earn cash incentives.

and share upcoming training opportunities. Each year they also produce a streamlined, bullet-point list of the program's requirements.

The idea for safety coordinators to team up in this way originated several years ago with Spencer Gray from Etowah County.

"We just try to make sure everybody in the group gets their bullets knocked out," Gray said. "It's tough if you don't know where to find all the info, and everybody's got another job."

Some meetings have drawn as many as a dozen counties, he said, and Morgan County generously provides a location for most of the gatherings.

"It's a lot of 'How did you do number 3? Because I'm having trouble making that happen,'" said Zac Marsh from Blount County.

To find out more about this Brilliant Idea at Work, contact Spencer Gray at sgray@etowahcounty.gov.

Dale County Persists Against Litter



© Francesco Scatena | Dreamstime

"Persistence" may be just a nice way of saying "stubbornness," but whatever term you prefer, it can be a critical part of brilliant ideas.

In Dale County, one problem that needed solving was roadside litter. "We had struggled to get something going," recalled Chairman Mark Blankenship. Inmate labor seemed like a good approach, but "it just kept falling through, and the sides of our roads were terrible."

Fortunately, the commission's persistence overcame the stubborn problem, and the solution is even sweeter because it provides gainful employment to citizens with limited options for work.

The county entered into a contract with Wiregrass Rehabilitation Inc. in Dothan. For its part, the county provides a truck and supplies such as garbage bags. Wiregrass Rehab provides the manpower, usually a crew of two or three laborers and a supervisor.

The general public provides the litter – and plenty of it. Fall of 2016 was the first time crew members worked the county, and they collected 20.8 tons of trash, including more than a hundred tires.

"They are doing a great job. It is putting people to work who would otherwise struggle to find employment," the chairman said.



Photo credit: Dale County

Blankenship said the plan is to collect roadside trash countywide twice a year. The spring phase started in March and is slated to conclude before right-of-way mowing begins this summer.

Wiregrass Rehab is a nonprofit that offers a variety of programs to help with individuals with job readiness, often utilizing an “earn while you learn” approach to training. ■

To find out more about this Brilliant Idea at Work in Dale County, contact Chairman Mark Blankenship at 334-774-6025 x2405 or mblankenship@dalecountyal.org.



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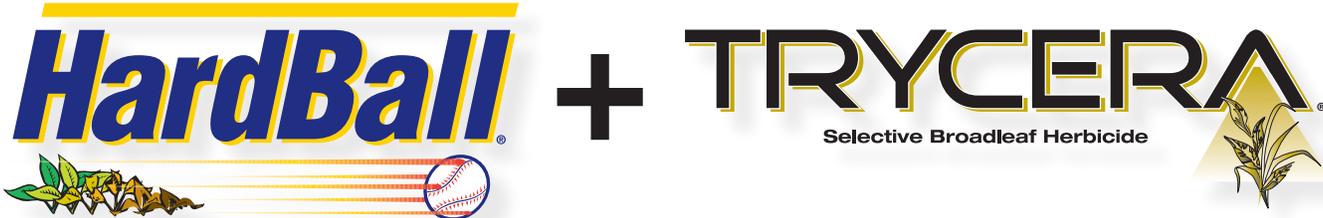
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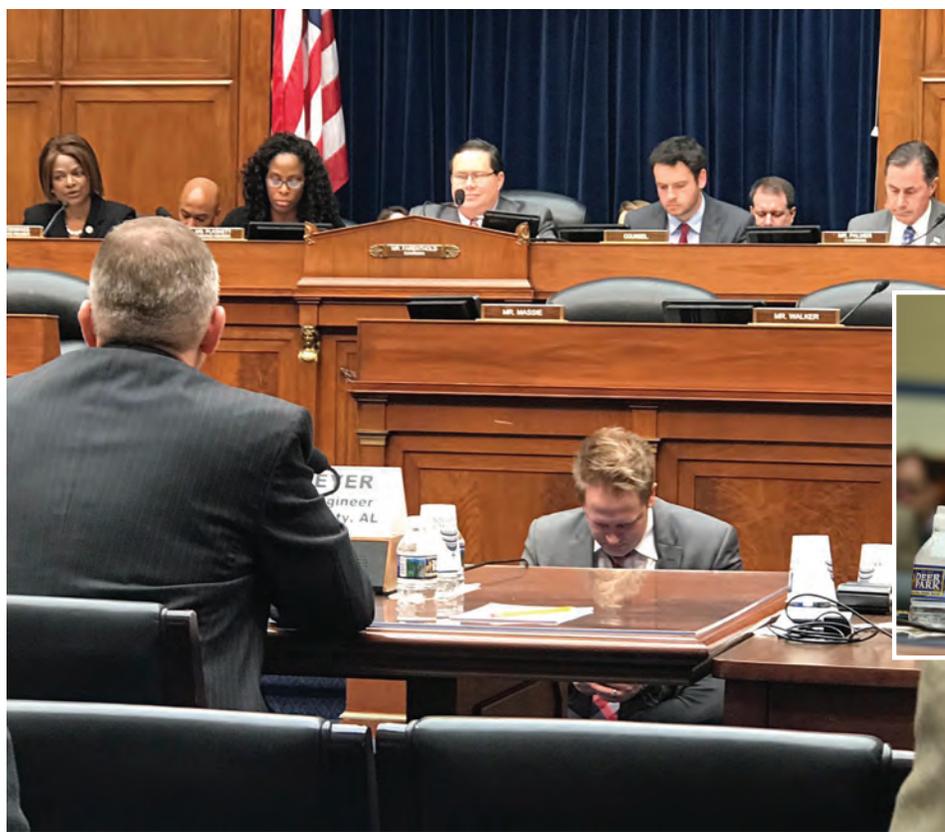


Beyer: Federal red tape doubles project costs

On the prowl for government inefficiencies to eradicate, some members of Congress brought in an expert hunting guide for a recent hearing.

Elmore County Engineer Richie Beyer put their sights squarely on impediments to infrastructure improvements and economic growth. “Federal mandates and environmental requirements hamper Alabama’s efforts to recover its decaying roads and bridges,” testified Beyer.

He spoke before two subcommittees of the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. Rep. Gary Palmer of Hoover, Ala., chairs one of the panels, the Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Affairs.



- Exempting projects utilizing less than \$5 million in federal funds from all federal requirements in favor of state or local standards;
- When transportation facilities sustain damage from a disaster, exempting emergency repairs from federal requirements to expedite restoration of services and lower the cost of repairs.

Beyer illustrated with Elmore County examples, such as a simple resurfacing project that yielded a project file 20 times thicker than the overlay placed on the roadway. But he went on to assure committee members that their chosen prey – these bureaucratic inefficiencies – cause similar distress for local governments throughout the country.

A number of county commissioners and engineers from Alabama attended the March 1 hearing, which coincided with the NACo Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C.

Beyer is a past president of the National Association of County Engineers (NACE), which recognized him as Rural County Engineer of the Year. Beyer currently serves as vice chairman on the National Association of Counties (NACo) Transportation Steering Committee, and he is also a past president of the Association of County Engineers of Alabama. ■

>>> *Get more at:* <https://shar.es/1U8yFZ>
NACo article • Video of 90-minute hearing • Full written testimony

“When county projects utilize federal funding, higher project costs and longer delivery times are the norm,” Beyer said. “Bureaucratic red tape and cumbersome environmental reviews slow projects down and drive labor costs up. Currently, counties are required to follow the same exhaustive federal requirements on a small sidewalk or preservation project as they would for mega-projects.”

In the course of the 90-minute hearing, Palmer asked how further control for federal aid projects could be delegated to the state and local level. With marksman’s precision, Beyer identified specific reforms:

Excerpted from:

**Written Statement for the Record
Walter Richard (Richie) Beyer IV,
County Engineer,
Elmore County, Alabama**

March 1, 2017, Washington, D.C.

Chairman Palmer, Chairman Farenthold, Ranking Member Demings, Ranking Member Plaskett and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations and Subcommittee on Interior, Energy and Interior, thank you for holding today's hearing. I am honored to testify before you today on federal environmental impediments to project delivery on behalf of the National Association of Counties and National Association of County Engineers.

My name is Richie Beyer, and I serve as the County Engineer for Elmore County, Alabama. Elmore County serves a population of approximately 82,000 and is one of the fastest growing counties in our state. Located just north of our state's capital, Montgomery, we are a destination for many who wish to live in a setting with abundant natural resources, a quality education system and a comfortable standard of living.

My experience in infrastructure development extends not only to Elmore County, but to the national level as well, as I am a past president of the National Association of County Engineers and currently serve as Vice-Chairman on the National Association of Counties' Transportation Steering Committee. I have served on various state and federal committees and working groups during my tenure with county government, many of which have focused on the effective delivery of projects and the effective use of federal funding.

Elmore County is responsible for over 1,000 public road miles and 127 public bridges within our boundaries. Our funding resources, however, are not sufficient to address what is needed to maintain our vast infrastructure. "The Silent Crisis," a 2010 analysis of Alabama county roads and bridges, indicated Elmore County's surface infrastructure system operates on

about one-third of the revenue needed to adequately maintain our road and bridges. It's important to note that this analysis did not take into account the capacity needs of the county, only the basic maintenance needs for our roads and bridges. With Elmore County's growing population as a burgeoning suburb of our state capital, our roads and bridges are experiencing more traffic than ever. As a result, our surface transportation infrastructure is under more increasing stress.

Counties face financial challenges because, in many cases, state legislatures limit our ability to raise revenue to fund critical infrastructure projects. The main general revenue sources for a great many counties are property and sales taxes. However, while counties in 45 states collect property taxes, they can only keep about a quarter (23.7 percent) of what is collected. Limitations like these that significantly impact counties' ability to effectively raise additional revenue to pay for services and infrastructure, especially unforeseen expenses such as emergency repairs. Due to these state and local funding constraints, counties such as Elmore depend on a strong state and federal partnership to deliver transportation investments that are critical to our communities and our national economy. Our nation's 3,069 counties build and maintain 45 percent of public road miles and 40 percent of bridges, as well as over one-third of the nation's transit systems and airports. Not only do county roads, bridges and highways connect our counties and states, they serve as a lifeline for rural counties and our citizens, playing a critical role in the movement of freight and other goods and services.

This situation is not unique to Elmore County. My county shares many similarities with counties across the nation who work every day to stretch the taxpayer dollars they are entrusted to manage to ensure their most effective and efficient use. Counties are innovators and in many cases must be to survive. The federal government can assist this innovation by providing a regulatory environment designed to empower project delivery, not hamper it. My remarks to this committee today will provide recommendations to strengthen this cooperation.

I am reminded of an observation made to me several years ago by someone that I have great respect for. He observed that, in most situations, lower levels of government inevitably believe that the higher levels of government have the funding to address issues,

while the higher levels of government don't think that the lower levels of government have the expertise to properly manage the resources with which they are entrusted. Thus, we have an ongoing struggle between levels of government for control and an increased chance that our resources aren't going to be utilized in the most effective manner. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "*Our distrust is very expensive.*"

The infrastructure partnership between local, state, and the federal government is a key element in the success of our nation's economies. Local roads are the original arterial roadways; it is these roadways which connect to our state and federal highway system. All routes originate on these local roads. Finding the balance between regulation and reality is the key, to making this partnership productive for the American people. Today, I will highlight some of these challenges and provide recommendations for how Congress can help us tackle these issues.

I will also illustrate three areas where local government can accomplish faster project completion without sacrificing environmental oversight or project safety. Whether they be road or bridge projects or emergency repairs, local governments possess the capabilities to produce results in considerably less time and for less money. ...

In 2013, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that inefficient use of federal funds can occur when the cost of complying with federal requirements is high relative to a project's cost. While the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has taken steps to improve the efficiency of federal-aid projects, it has not explored or issued guidance targeted to local agencies on how they can maximize administrative flexibilities, despite internal and external recommendations to do so. Some local agency officials GAO interviewed stated they do not pursue federal funding for projects under certain dollar thresholds because the cost involved outweighs the benefits; however, others choose to do so due to a lack of funding alternatives. In times of emergencies, most counties are not afforded the luxury of deciding whether or not to request federal funds – they are a necessity.

Working through these issues and delays has given me the experience and perspective necessary to identify possible solutions to make this partnership more

effective and less costly to local governments, while at the same time not sacrificing safety or established environmental protocols.

Potential Solutions- Establish Exemptions and Empower All Levels of Government

These examples point to some of the challenges we face in local government. I offer the following **two recommendations** for ensuring we can provide our citizens the best possible services given our limited resources.

The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) set a precedent by identifying a category of low risk projects appropriate for Categorical Exclusions [23 CFR Part 771.117 (c) and/or (d)]. In addition, MAP-21 established financial thresholds categorically excluding projects from environmental reviews, provided that the projects receive less than \$5,000,000 in federal funds. The FAST Act reinforced these principles.

First, we would like to recommend that Congress build on the principles introduced in MAP-21 and furthered in the FAST Act by creating an exemption from all federal requirements if the project receives less than \$5,000,000 in federal funding. The state and local governments would apply the appropriate state or local standards and specifications to their projects and follow state law to bid for, award and execute their projects. State and local governments could also perform work under force account, provided there is a substantial cost savings to the public by doing so. No state or federal oversight would apply to these projects, which will ensure more funding makes it to tangible projects. Low risk projects as defined in the FAST Act could easily be grouped into this exemption, but strong consideration should be given to defining bridge replacement projects where no major relocation occurs as an exempt action as well.

What would be the impacts of this type of change?

First, more of our fuel tax will reach the public in the form of tangible road and bridge projects. Quite simply, we are currently seeing gas tax money go to meeting duplicative federal regulations as opposed to the project itself. While cutting out these duplicative regulations will not solve gas tax funding issues, this approach shows our citizens that we are doing everything possible to be efficient with the resources we have been entrusted to manage.

Second, local and state governments can best evaluate the needs of their communities and the appropriate project scope that provides the greatest benefit to the communities.

Third, the various federal agencies can focus their efforts on moving large scale highway projects through the process and refocus their efforts on being resources to the state and local governments to meet the needs of our communities.

Lastly, the public wins. More resources are directed to projects that they can see, use, and reap the benefits from through an improved quality of life – all while improving our transportation network, which serves as the backbone for our nation’s economy.

This only works if the federal government has enough faith in states and counties to ensure public safety for their citizens. While I have no doubt the intentions of the federal government are to protect the public, there must be a realization that states have that same interest.

The FAST Act and MAP-21 both included provisions exempting emergency repair work when federal assistance is involved, but they do not go far enough, as there are still a multitude of project

types that are susceptible to review regardless of the scale of its undertaking. For example, the Holley Mill Road project mentioned above could have been completed quicker for less money. More importantly, the bureaucratic delays of this project placed lives in danger. **Creation of an exemption that removes all federal requirements from emergency repairs to any transportation facility damaged by a disaster would expedite restoration of services to our citizens, lower the costs of repairs and refocus federal resources to be available to support and assist with recovery efforts.**

In closing, counties stand ready to work with our federal partners to achieve our shared goals of strengthening transportation networks, improving public safety and advancing our economic competitiveness. We need a strong, reliable federal partner that allows us to practically address the needs of our constituents.

Thank you again, Chairmen. Ranking Members and members of the Subcommittees, for the opportunity to testify today. I would be pleased to answer any questions.

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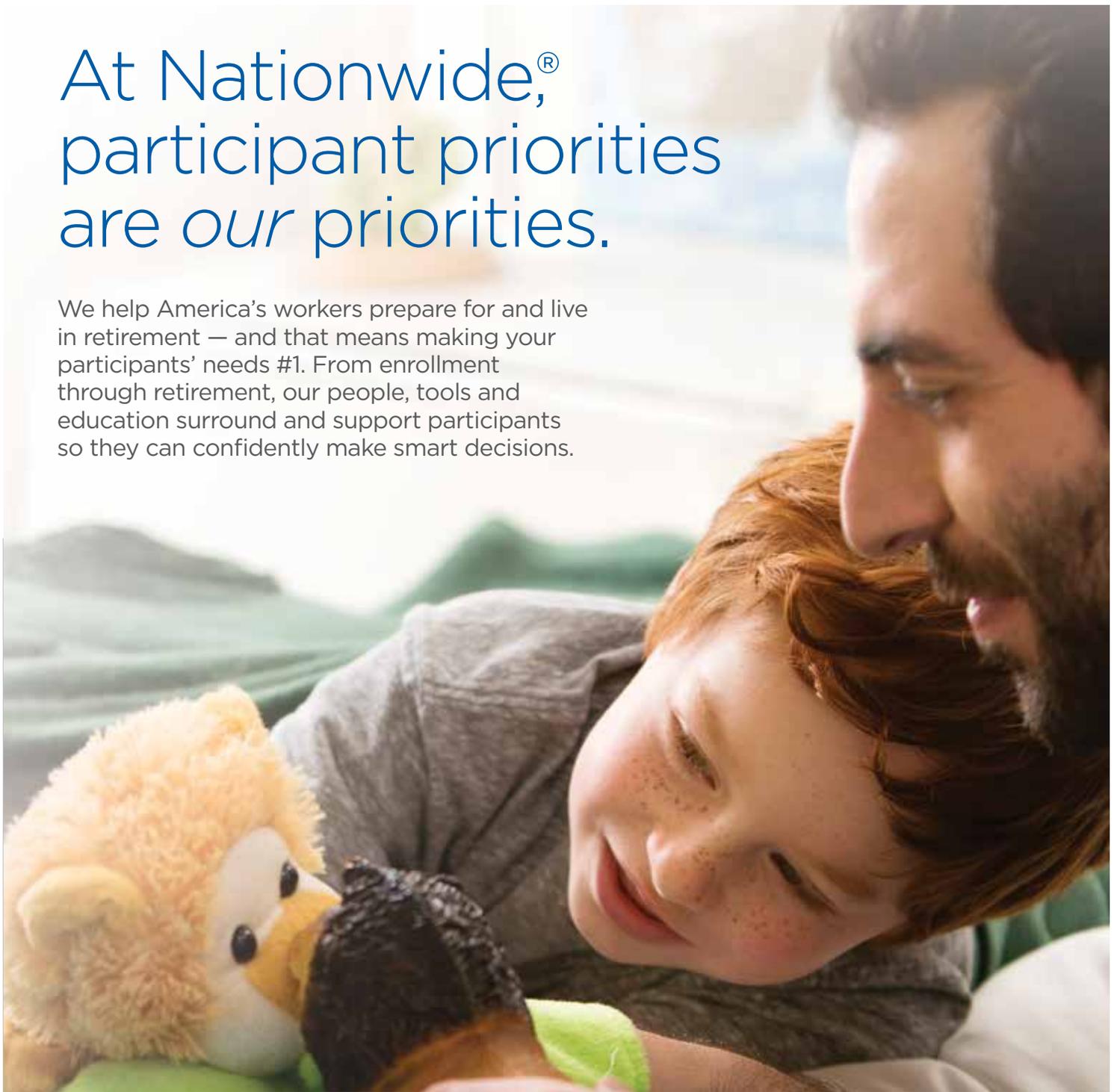


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NRM-10021AL (4/2016)

Equipping You to Better Serve Your County



By The Hon. Bryan Desloge



2017 brings new faces to all levels of government, and thousands of leaders are beginning new roles in county government. To those leaving county government, thank you for your service. To those beginning or continuing county service, we look forward to your participation in the National Association of Counties (NACo) in the coming year.

For many of you, this may be your first time holding public office. More than a decade ago, I was in the same position when I was first elected to the Leon County, Fla., Board of Commissioners.

In my early days as a commissioner, just as my state association proved to be invaluable, I quickly learned that NACo was also tremendously helpful. Through unique services, resources and programs, NACo empowered me to be a more effective county leader, and I know NACo will equip you to better serve your county. Here's a quick snapshot of what we're doing at the national level to keep counties healthy, vibrant and safe.

Federal Advocacy

Washington, D.C., may seem distant and unrelated to your day-to-day responsibilities, but decisions made by the White House, Congress and federal courts have major, cascading impacts

on our ability to lead our communities and pursue a better future. Federal legislation, regulations and unfunded mandates can significantly affect county budgets and our residents' lives.

NACo adeptly represents our nation's 3,069 counties, parishes and boroughs in our intergovernmental system and offers resources to keep county officials informed and engaged on issues important to our residents. County News (www.naco.org/news), your print and online newspaper, connects you to counties across the nation. Policy briefs, reports and other resources can be found at www.NACo.org/advocacy.

NACo also gives its members the opportunity to be directly involved in the federal policy process. More than 1,300 members serve on NACo committees, boards and caucuses that address a wide variety of issues.

Through our 10 policy steering committees, members set NACo's agenda and legislative priorities. In 2016, our members testified before Congress on key legislative and regulatory issues facing counties and represented counties on more than 50 federal task forces and advisory groups.

NACo is truly elevating county voices in Washington, D.C., and I encourage you to get involved by

joining a policy committee.

Resources

For many county leaders, serving on the county board is a part-time job with full-time responsibilities. That's why NACo provides easily accessible, online resources that will save you time and energy.

NACo's award-winning County Explorer (<http://explorer.naco.org>) gives you access to county-specific data right at your fingertips. This interactive online tool, with more than 900 data sets, grows every month with new research and updates. It also provides county-specific profiles for issues such as endangered species and transportation, and state-specific profiles for issues like tax-exempt municipal bonds.

We maintain a grants clearinghouse with hundreds of federal grant opportunities for counties. This online, one-stop shop enables NACo members to search for grants by category, eligibility, funder type and state.

Lastly, you'll be making difficult decisions every day, and NACo understands how important it is to have accurate information readily available. NACo offers a large collection of research publications, reports and webinars online for free. NACo is here to help you and your county thrive.

Cost-Saving Solutions

Budget constraints are an issue in every county, and NACo provides programs designed to save your county and residents money. Here are some examples:

- I U.S. Communities Cooperative Purchasing Alliance – Leveraging the purchasing power of more than 70,000 public sector entities.
- I Nationwide Deferred Compensation and other employee benefits – Helping more than 1.5 million county employees and retirees save more than \$15 billion extra for retirement.
- Live Healthy U.S. Counties – NACo member counties have achieved \$650 million in savings on prescription drug, health and dental services for county residents.



Bryan Desloge has focused his presidential initiative, Brilliant Ideas at Work, on bringing recognition to county innovations and helping NACo members learn from one another's best practices.

- I encourage you to leverage your NACo membership to benefit your communities and residents. Together, we can build stronger counties and a stronger America.

The Hon. Bryan Desloge is president of the National Association of Counties and a Leon County, Fla., commissioner. For more information, contact membership@naco.org. ■

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Ellis steps from the courthouse to the Statehouse

After a decade's service on the Shelby County Commission, Corley Ellis knows exactly what he is proudest of – but he is quick to give credit to others, including the county's professional staff.

"In the Great Recession, we fared very well. We laid off very few people," Ellis recalled, noting that commissioners worked well together and shared a conservative attitude on finances. "I'm proud of how we overcame that adversity – and how well prepared we were for it."

Ellis joined the commission in 2006, shortly before the financial crunch. He pointed out that the county was already running like a machine at that time. Elected officials had provided strong and steady leadership, and they had assembled an outstanding group of staff leaders and professional advisors – including his dad, Butch Ellis, at county attorney.

"I'd put them against any Fortune 500 company in the country,"



Hon. Corley Ellis

District 41, Alabama House of Representatives

Elected to the Legislature:
October 2016 (*special election*)

Legislative Committee Appointments:

Financial Services,
Shelby County Legislation,
Local Legislation

County commission service:
Represented Shelby County's
District 1, 2006-2016

Home: Columbiana

Professional: Real estate broker
& investor, Ellis Properties Inc.

Family: Wife, Julie,
and five-year-old son, Jamison

Corley said. "They are great people to work with."

However, these days his official duties typically take him not to the courthouse in Columbiana but to the Statehouse in Montgomery.

Last October, Ellis was elected to fill a midterm vacancy in the Alabama House of Representatives. Republican Mike Hill had represented District 41 for 30 years, and Gov. Robert Bentley appointed Hill to his cabinet as superintendent of the banking department.

Over the years, Hill had frequently supported county government on legislative issues and sponsored bills on ACCA's behalf. Corley brings another strong county connection to the district located entirely within Shelby County.

In the Legislature, the unofficial County Caucus is composed of legislators who have served as commissioners. Corley's election brings the caucus up to 13 members.

If you throw in the municipalities of Calera and Chelsea, his House district is "almost identical" to his former commission district, Ellis said.

Officially, he took the oath of office right away, but his family joined him in Montgomery for a ceremonial swearing in on the House floor. Ellis said it was a

With House members and a packed gallery looking on, Speaker Mac McCutcheon (left) administered the oath of office to Rep. Corley Ellis on the first day of the 2017 Regular Session. His five-year-old son, Jamison, took responsibility for holding the Bible. Also present for the special moment were his wife, Julie, and parents, Diane and Butch Ellis.



Photo credit: Dionne Whetstone, Alabama House of Representatives

County Caucus

Rep. George Bandy, Lee

Rep. Jim Carns, Jefferson

*Sen. Clyde Chambliss,
Autauga*

Rep. Corley Ellis, Baldwin

Rep. Joe Faust, Baldwin

Rep. Berry Forte, Barbour

*Rep. Steve Hurst,
Talladega*

*Rep. Reed Ingram,
Montgomery*

*Rep. John Knight,
Montgomery*

*Rep. Dimitri Polizos,
Montgomery*

Rep. Randall Shedd, Cullman

Rep. David Standridge, Blount

Rep. Randy Wood, Calhoun

humbling moment. "That's a big deal to me," he said. "That's where the people's business takes place."

He described the session's first week as fun and interesting. "It was a week I thought would never get here. I wanted to dive in and see what I've gotten myself into," he said.

Ellis identified three major influences on his approach to serving in the Legislature.

"My dad always says to leave things better than you found them," he said, and this focus on the future intensified greatly when he became a dad himself. He and his wife, Julie, welcomed their son, Jamison, to the family five years ago.

As the owner of a small business, Ellis said that he puts a high value on contributions that the small business sector makes to the state economy and individual communities.

And that decade as a county commissioner, working closely with

other local government bodies, gives him a deeper appreciation for the trickle-down effect of state-level decisions.

"It's so interconnected," he said. "You've got to think through all the aspects." ■



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A passion for developing leaders

Legendary coach Vince Lombardi once said leaders are made, not born. Some leaders learn as they go, while others are groomed. Some turn new experiences into an opportunity for growth, while others are given the tools for success and face the challenge when the time is right. For a group of high school seniors in Lawrence County finding their way in the world, that time is now.

Lawrence County Commissioner Joey Hargrove is no stranger to charting his own path to leadership. When he was first elected in 2010, he didn't know the ins and outs of county government. He dedicated countless hours to relearning things about governmental organization he had not thought about in decades, because he felt like he owed it to his community. He knew that if the future of Lawrence County was to rest in the hands of the next generation, there had to be a better way.

When the inaugural PLAN group of 2016 was charged with developing a Passion Project, for Hargrove it was an easy decision. He chose to teach local high school students about county government and how it affects their everyday lives. As his first order of business, he had the group of high school seniors elect classroom officials. He hoped that by giving them the opportunity to take on a leadership role in the classroom, they would be

encouraged to pursue other leadership roles in the future.

Hargrove upped the ante last month when he loaded the group of over 30 students on a school bus for a field trip to Montgomery. The day began with a trip to the Alabama Statehouse, where students met their local legislators and watched as bills moved one step closer to becoming law. They concluded their Montgomery tour at the Alabama Capitol, where the

Hargrove said that seeing the students get excited about the classroom elections and their ideas for improving the community is his greatest reward with the project. And although the PLAN 2016 group has completed its journey, the two-term commissioner plans to continue building his Passion Project with the students of East Lawrence High School. He wants to keep the project going for years to come, giving every East Lawrence



Jamie Martin, Governor's Office

East Lawrence High School's Class of 2017 and Commissioner Joey Hargrove at Alabama's historic capitol building.

students learned about the history of Alabama's government and the role of the executive branch in the legislative process.

"It was really cool to see where all of our laws are made and what the process looks like," said one East Lawrence senior. "It's one thing to learn about all of this from a textbook, but it adds meaning to it when you get to see the legislators and landmarks in person."

student the opportunity to learn more about local and state government during their senior year.

"I think we may have a future commissioner or two in this group," said Hargrove with a laugh. "I hope I've opened their eyes to how government works, and how critically important these roles are for the county. You can never be too young to think about ways that you can better your community." ■

Commissioners step forward for PLAN 2018

A total of 21 county commissioners, newly re-elected to their second terms, have stepped forward to accelerate their growth as leaders through the Association's PLAN 2018 program. It is a diverse group, representing counties with populations large and small that very nearly span the state geographically, from Jackson southward to Covington and Tuscaloosa eastward to Russell.

Together they are focusing on passion, leadership, accountability and networking, and their journey is off to an exceptional start. Commissioners involved in the program are in the early stages of identifying their passion projects, which will be revealed in August at the 2017 ACCA Convention. They are also diving into their connections with ACCA's affiliate groups for county professionals,

Jay Thompson, Autauga County
 Joey Peavy, Butler County
 Ray Milstead, Clay County
 Laura Cobb, Cleburne County
 Marcie Foster, Cherokee County
 Johnny Andrews, Conecuh County
 Jimmy Jones, Coffee County
 David Black, Colbert County
 Kenneth Northey, Covington County
 Kenneth Walker, Cullman County
 Mark Blankenship, Dale County
 Matthew Hodges, Jackson County
 Steve Haraway, Madison County
 Dan Harris, Montgomery County
 Ronda M. Walker, Montgomery County
 Ron Miller, Perry County
 Larry Roberts, Randolph County
 Chance Corbett, Russell County
 Jerry Tingle, Tuscaloosa County
 Keith Davis, Walker County
 Bill Albritton, Wilcox County

including administrators, engineers, emergency managers, revenue officers and 9-1-1 district staff.

The PLAN program, while only in its second class, has proven to be an effective way to connect second-term county commissioners with their communities. The Association and its members look forward to what the PLAN 2018 class will accomplish for Alabama counties.

PLAN 2018 Mission Statement:

Together, 21 second-term county commissioners, elected into an environment of mistrust, unsolved problems, and expanding challenges, commit their collective energy and vision to enhance their leadership skills, hold themselves accountable, and focus their individual passions on the needs of their communities. ■



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COUNTY FAMILY FEATURE



The Alabama Transportation Rehabilitation and Improvement Program (ATRIP-1) pumped \$12 million in Coffee County's roads and bridges, including maintenance and safety improvements to more than 7 miles of CR606.

Unity Despite Differences

Counties vary but engineers join forces seamlessly

The close collaboration of county engineers is all the more impressive when you consider the differences in their duties, but these contrasts have not distracted them from the goal of new revenue for county roads and bridges this year. Exhibit A might be Coffee County, where the engineer has an unusual plate of work.

For starters, there's the area's history of infrastructure-destroying natural disasters, with the flood-prone Pea River bisecting the county diagonally.

Then there's responsibility for a regional landfill that has a track record of turning a byproduct into a revenue stream. And don't forget the county's scrap tire recycling center serving parts

of three states.

Not to mention, buildings and grounds were added to his plate a couple of years back with a charge to find a way to pay for predictable capital projects without borrowing money.



Randy Tindell, Engineer, Coffee County.

Whew. While some people might run the other way from that smorgasbord of duties, Randy Tindell has held down the job since 1995.

When you meet him in person, no supernatural powers are evident. His county vehicle is not likely to be mistaken for the Batmobile.

Rather, Tindell just seems like one of the nicest people you would ever hope to meet – the epitome of an engineer, sense of humor on the dry side. If you want to see him light up, ask about Leila, his first and only grandchild, born last year.

But he's got that overachiever habit that runs in the "county family," the gene that enables the 67 counties to accomplish remarkable things despite enormous challenges.

Tindell credits his assistants who oversee the three departments: Marty Lentz at assistant engineer, Mike Thornton in environmental services and Todd Rugg in buildings and grounds. Thornton, the newbie of the bunch, has only 17 years with the county.

As for himself, Tindell is eligible to retire if he wants. He has also worked as assistant engineer in Cherokee, Geneva and Coffee counties as well as a few years as engineer in his native Geneva County. He says he is invested in seeing several current projects through – or at least well into implementation.

Highways

Coffee County's highway department has responsibility for nearly 800 miles of roadways (about 70 percent paved) and 154 bridge structures, but it is almost impossible to have a conversation about the transportation infrastructure without talking about natural disasters. Tindell said he's worked through at least a dozen that were federally declared.

At the moment, the department is still making repairs stemming from the December 2015 floods that caused widespread damage throughout the state.

"The rainfall amount was just a grunt more than 1990," he said. That year, miles and miles of county roads were destroyed and Elba flooded so badly that there was a serious conversation about moving the whole town to higher ground.

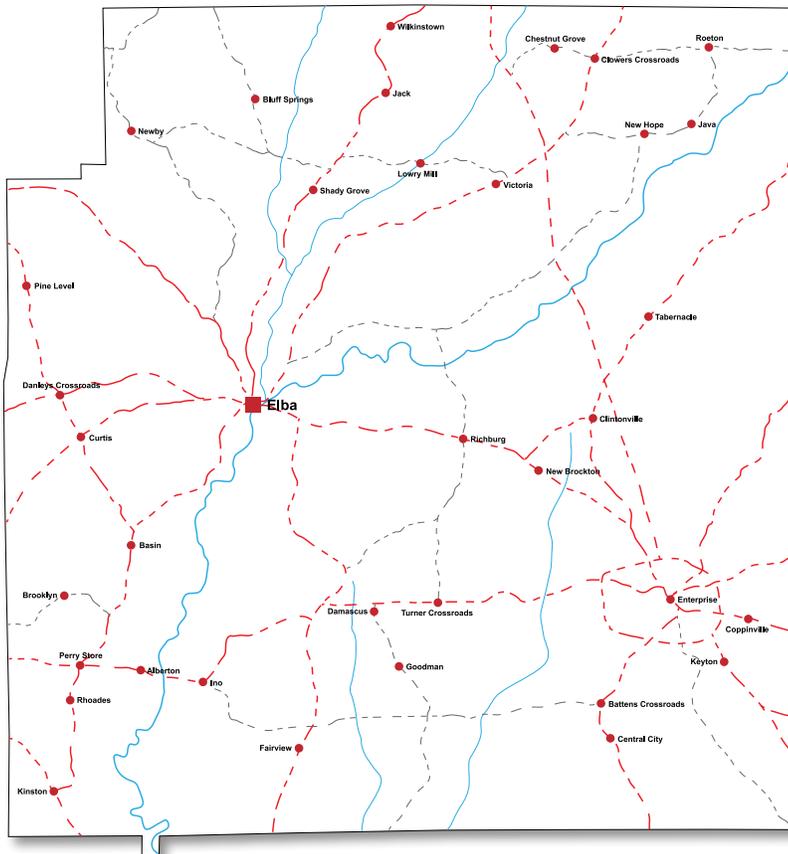
But 25 years later, "we withstood it a whole lot better," Tindell said.

Environmental Services

Though the county's environmental programs are multi-faceted, it is the landfill operation that has drawn Tindell into state policy discussions about solid waste management. ACCA tapped him to serve on a task force working on reforms to the landfill permitting process, and legislation is pending.

Today the county's subtitle D landfill serves about a dozen counties in the Wiregrass. Opened in 1993 during Mark Pool's tenure as engineer, it was the first landfill in Alabama to meet modern environmental standards. A gas collection system was voluntarily installed in the last

- County seat
- City
- Primary highway
- Secondary highway
- Other roads



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10 years, and it more than paid for itself through sales of carbon credits.

That particular initiative is on hold due to market conditions, but the county has explored other options to harness the byproduct for generating electricity or fueling vehicles with compressed methane.

A fee is charged when anyone makes a delivery to the scrap tire facility. The metal collected is sold for scrap, and, currently, a paper mill in Georgia buys the rubber for fuel. "There's tremendous energy in tires. I wanted to be on the front end of that," Tindell said. "It might be a significant future revenue stream for the county, as well as protecting the environment."

Buildings & Grounds

Coffee is one of the few counties in Alabama that has assigned oversight of buildings and grounds to the engineer. When Tindell's phone rings, it might be a complaint about a pothole, but it could just as easily be "anything

“*We stand a better chance statewide,” he said, “convincing legislators as a whole to go out on a limb for their constituents than what Coffee County would by itself.*”



Randy Tindell's first tour of duty in Coffee County was as assistant engineer under Mark Pool in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

from a toilet not flushing to 'we need to add a new wing on,'" he said, laughing.

Coming to a close is one round of capital improvements that included energy conservation projects for all county buildings. The energy savings are sufficient to repay the loan for this batch of improvements. Looking ahead,

the commission asked Administrator Rod Morgan and Tindell to find a way to pay for expenses that can be anticipated without borrowing money.

Under normal conditions a new roof might be expected to last for decades, but it won't last forever. With that in mind, the commission has established a mechanism to set money aside for these longer-range projects.

"At the end of 20 years, there will be enough money in the account to do what we had to borrow to do this time," Tindell said.

For all Coffee County's resilience, entrepreneurship and ingenuity, it needs the Alabama Legislature to invest in local roads and bridges this year about as badly as any county.

"We have desperate needs on local roads," Tindell said. "There is no funding available to counties like us."

A past president of the Association of County Engineers of Alabama, he said this is a time for counties to stick together.

"We stand a better chance statewide," he said, "convincing legislators as a whole to go out on a limb for their constituents than what Coffee County would by itself." ■

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A voice from Alabama's 67 counties

Amy Beard, CCRO
*Revenue Compliance Officer,
Madison County
Education Committee Chair
County Revenue Officers
Association of Alabama (CROAA)*

Q What is your biggest challenge as a revenue officer?

A Educating our taxpayers. I have so many that I talk with daily that do not have a good understanding of our tax structure. CROAA plays a huge part in that with educating our revenue officers.

Q CROAA's education program has undergone some big changes in the last few years. What were some of the goals for moving the program into the County Government Education Institute (CGEI)? How would you evaluate that decision and transition?

A The goal for moving our program was to see it expand and be more successful. With CGEI, it gives our members the opportunity to not only have

our classes, but also the CGEI classes as well. With every class, we have a course evaluation which allows us to see how well our members feel that the instructors are doing and give us comments and suggestions. It has been a great transition with having the ACCA able to work with us to get closer to our goal.

Q Why do you think CROAA puts such a high priority on professional development? How would you like to see the training program grow and strengthen in the next few years?

A When CROAA was established it was the hope that every county revenue officer would have the chance to be educated on the skills needed to



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work efficiently and effectively in their jobs. It has since grown, with members with several different job titles – not just revenue officers. I want CROAA to grow and strengthen with an even bigger increase in membership and getting more of our members involved with teaching classes. CROAA is a great opportunity for the employees in county government to learn and grow in their professions.

Q What are some of the other job titles and/or responsibilities that fit under the CROAA umbrella?

A There are so many varieties of duties in CROAA. We have revenue auditors, administrative assistants,

compliance officers, clerks, directors, license inspectors, commissioners and attorneys. Our goal is to have as much input from all the counties that we can.

Q What are the biggest benefits of CROAA membership?

A CROAA was started by the best in our organization to give everyone an opportunity to have a forum to discuss the collection and enforcement of county revenue. The biggest benefit would have to be the education. As chairman of the education committee, it is my hope that with every class & every meeting we have, someone takes away knowledge they didn't have before.

Q What is the value of CROAA membership for a county that doesn't self collect?

A Becoming a member of CROAA will allow you to not only be involved with our education program, but also the ACCA, which keeps us all updated on new legislation. If in the future they choose to self collect, they will have all the tools needed to be successful.

Q This year's theme for National County Government Month is "Brilliant Ideas at Work." In your area of focus, what are a few of your favorite Brilliant Ideas at Work in county government?



The Alabama Association of Emergency Managers salutes its 2017 honorees!

AAEM: An Affiliate of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama

Eddie Lary

TUSCALOOSA COUNTY

Pat Neuhauser Spirit of EMA Award

"Pipeline Emergency Response"

SHELBY COUNTY

**Response Programs of the Year
Large Size County**

"Storm Safety –

What's Your Plan?"

RUSSELL COUNTY

Preparedness Program of the Year

Mike Watkins

LEE COUNTY

Alfred T. Moore Memorial Volunteer Award

"NSIDE/MapsLive"

AUTAUGA COUNTY

**Response Programs of the Year
Medium Size County**

"Developing a Program -

Changing Strategy for Mitigation"

JEFFERSON COUNTY

Mitigation Program of the Year

A My idea is to start having more local meetings with surrounding counties to stay in touch and be more involved with the day-to-day duties we face.

Q What does “67 counties, ONE voice” mean to you?

A To me it means working together. The saying that one person can make a difference is especially true when our “67 Counties” work as one.

The County Revenue Officers Association of Alabama (CROAA) is a professional organization that exists to promote the proficiency of county revenue officers. As an affiliate of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama (ACCA), the group also provides a unified voice on legislative proposals that would threaten or enhance local revenue from license fees and taxes such as sales, use, liquor, lodging, rental, lease, gasoline and motor fuel. For more information, please visit www.alabamacounties.org/affiliates/croaa



SPEED DRILL with Amy Beard

Favorite college football team? *Tennessee! College football is definitely a religion in the south, although my house is a divided one. “Roll Tide” for my husband and son, but “Go Vols” for myself* | **Cats or dogs?** *Dogs!* | **Favorite holiday?** *Christmas* | **No. 1 quality you look for in co-workers?** *A positive attitude* | **First paying job?** *Lenscrafters* | **Dine in or eat out?** *Eating out* | **Is the glass half full or half empty?** *Half full always* | **As a child, I wanted to be a nurse when I grew up. (Although being a revenue compliance officer is the next best thing!)** | **What’s the next thing you want to binge watch?** *The Walking Dead* ■

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