

COUNTY COMMISSION

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ATRIP Status Report

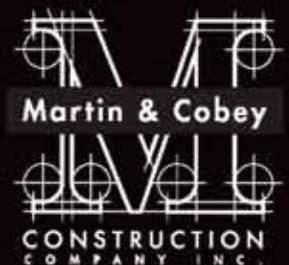


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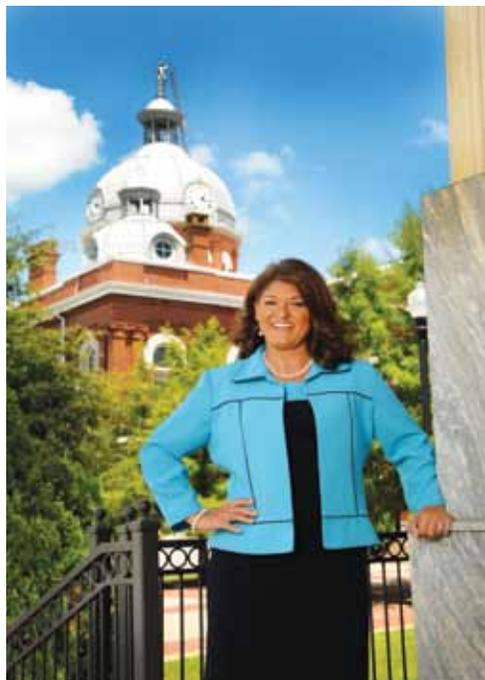
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Chambers County Commission Chair Debbie Wood, pictured with the Chambers County courthouse dome in the background, is ACCA's 2013-14 president. Photo: Dave Shirley Photography.

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President's Corner



Hon. Debbie Wood
President

Debbie Wood

Look to the future for betterment of all 67 counties

Each of us has role
to play in our success

Editor's note: This is the prepared text of the inaugural address that Debbie Wood delivered at the 2013 ACCA Annual Convention.

I am so richly honored and awed to stand before you tonight as the president of this outstanding and influential Association. The course that has been set before me most recently by Ricky Harcrow, Tim choate, Ricky Burney, Larry White and Joe Faulk is a challenge that I have pondered for the last six months. And when one thinks of the legacy left by Mark culver, who we honored today, by Hardy McCollum, Roger Hayes, Stanley Menefee, Rhondel Rhone and my friend Stan Batemon, one could be a bit uneasy on a night like this.

But I am not uncomfortably, nor am I uncertain, for I know that I am ready for the challenges that await us and tha, together, we will continue our tradition of speaking with one strong and unified voice for the protection and improvement of county government in our state. Certainly this year will require all our commitments, but we've all faced that together before and we'll be successful in facing that again during the next 12 months.

I have several things that I want to discuss with you tonight, before we depart this convention and head back home to serve the citizens who depend on our faithfulness, commitment and vision. And I trust that you, like me, will take many things from this convention that will assist you in weeks and months ahead. But first I want to recognize the people from my county and in my life who will be a part of the journey that is ahead of us ...

I did not ask my personal family

to stand because we wanted an opportunity to honor those family members who are here in the audience. As my family has been so important to me, I know that your family supporting you has been as well. If you are a family member of an elected official or county employee, will you please stand along with my family so we can honor you.

I originally had a very different theme and direction for tonight's speech. The events that happened recently in Fort Worth and during this year have certainly diverted my thoughts and have required me to set a different course of action. Having a candidate for the position of second vice president for the National Association of Counties, or as we refer to it "NACo," was exciting, demanding and much more emotional than any of us anticipated. Alabama had a qualified candidate who I found to be a man of great character, a great team of volunteers because you across this state stood and gave of your time, and one of the hardest working staffs coordinating the effort. Through this campaign I learned we have a very common trait across this state – we do not like to lose.

Tonight I would say that we did lose that race but we must continue our fight to win the ultimate battle. Stan Batemon did not enter the race for personal or selfish reasons. His desire was to offer himself as a leader to prosper and promote county government. Fortunately for us and NACo, he will still remain active and continue with his service. We still suffered some bruises and have some healing to do. And some of you may be wondering about our direction for

We will do what every successful organization must do – we will learn from the past, but not dwell on it. We will turn toward the future with a resolve to continue the legacy created by those who have committed their public service to this Association and we will honor them by ensuring that the organization continues to speak with one voice that leads to improvement, enhancement and protection of counties in Alabama.

the future. Tonight I am here to be the compass and explain what we do and how we go forward.

Tonight, we will do what every successful organization must do – we will learn from the past, but not dwell on it. We will turn toward the future with a resolve to continue the legacy created by those who have committed their public service to this Association and we will honor them by ensuring that the organization continues to speak with one voice that leads to

improvement, enhancement and protection of counties in Alabama. As we look toward the course that we must set together, I challenge you tonight to enlarge your spirit and commitment for this Association. We must resolve to work as a group, for there is so much to accomplish. So let's get started reviewing what is in store for us together this year.

This year we will continue the emphasis on education – started by Ricky Harcrow – that will culminate with the

Association's new leadership program in January of 2015. This program will be open to those commissioners who enter their second term in November of 2014 and will emphasize more active involvement in the Association, leadership in legislative and Congressional advocacy and interaction with our affiliate groups.

Today you participated in an interactive program designed to give us insight into how the Association can better

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The County Line



Sonny Brasfield
Executive Director

Sonny Brasfield

**After 25 years,
it is time
to consider
new idea**

**Opportunity exists to make
67 Counties, One Voice
even stronger**

“Introductions are always kind of awkward things. You shake hands with someone you’ve never seen before and most times you don’t know what to say to each other. But after the first few moments, you sometimes find that the two of you have a great deal in common.”

With that grand statement, I began a bi-monthly ritual of providing commentary, advice and – occasionally – useful insight into county government in Alabama. Those words were written 25 years ago this month, when “County Line” first appeared in the magazine of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama.

I had just joined ACCA as Director of Public Relations and wanted to introduce myself and highlight the fact that, once everyone got to know me, they might realize we had a great deal in common. I was new, full of “grand” ideas and hoping to make a difference.

Since then, we’ve written about 100 of these columns and we’ve watched the magazine, the Association, the people who serve and hold office at the local level, the services we provide, the public’s view of counties and the daily challenges we face undergo a major facelift. It has been our pleasure to be a small part of those alterations and to serve alongside hundreds of elected officials and employees.

Now, 25 years later, introductions are still awkward things, and it is time to introduce ourselves to a new idea.

That first introduction so many years ago was to Buddy Sharpless, ACCA’s executive director for 36 years. He encouraged me to expand my role and

supported my missteps with patience and advice. Though he retired almost five years ago, not a day goes by that I do not rely on his leadership and wisdom.

Today more than 40 percent of Alabama’s county commissioners are in their first terms. After each election, we’ve tried to introduce ourselves and this Association in a way that encourages new commissioners to become active and energetic county officials. For the most part, those introductions have been effective.

As new county employees are hired and become part of our “family” we introduce ourselves and this Association to those who – again, we hope – will lean on and trust this Association. Through our educational programs, legal and technical advice and the many ways the Association extends its hand to all 67 counties, we trust those introductions have been fruitful.

Today this Association introduces itself as “67 Counties. One Voice.” And almost all the time that one voice is unified and strong. It is, in fact, the strength and unity of that voice that has been the backbone of changes over the last quarter century.

That single voice is challenged from time to time, and that’s when it is necessary to “re-introduce” the things that have led us to this point. Alabama’s counties enjoy a unique position, primarily because the people leading those counties have pushed for, protected and promoted policy change without being diverted by division and single-mindedness that currently plagues government around our nation.

Twenty five years after we started this journey together, it is time for us to introduce ourselves to a new way of expanding our strength by unifying our voice with our colleagues around the courthouse – the sheriffs, tax officials, probate judges and others.

Their introductions to the Association have effectively imparted a responsibility to pull together in one direction and to rely on the collective strength as a defense against those who neither appreciate nor support the role county government plays in our state.

In 2015 we'll begin a new leadership program for county commissioners entering their second terms. We look forward to introducing those "sophomore" commissioners to a new vision – based on unity and strength – that will move this outstanding organization forward.

And next November we'll also introduce ourselves to a new crop of legislators, who will come to Montgomery with their own vision. It will be up to this Association to help align those visions with the best interest of county government and the people we serve. That will only be accomplished by expanding our involvement beyond the county commission office and into all of county government. Twenty five years after we started this journey together, it is time for us to introduce ourselves to a new way of expanding our strength by unifying our voice with our

colleagues around the courthouse – the sheriffs, tax officials, probate judges and others.

This idea will need some time to grow and we'll need partners in those groups who will work with the same vision of 67 counties speaking with a strong and unified voice. And, much like that introduction 25 years ago, things may seem awkward at first. But if we'll give this new idea a chance, something tells me we'll again find we have much more in common that we first thought and all of county government will benefit from our willingness to introduce ourselves to something new.



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Mary E. Pons
Association Counsel



Revising process for local bills could be very positive

Proposal would change
advertising requirement,
allow amendments
during legislative process

The Constitutional Revision Commission was created by the Alabama Legislature to review Alabama's unwieldy constitution and make recommendations for changes to remove obsolete or unconstitutional provisions and, more importantly, to modernize the document for the 21st century. Over the last two years, this deliberative body has worked diligently to review each article of the Constitution for desired or necessary changes – and earlier this year adjourned sine die with a report recommending a variety of technical and substantive changes to the current constitution. The Association staff has carefully monitored the work of this Commission every step of the way, and actively participated in discussions and deliberations on issues related to local government. This was a time-consuming but very worthwhile project for county government, as the final report of the commission includes three recommended changes that, if approved by the Alabama Legislature and ratified by statewide referendum, will have a very positive impact on county government. Those recommendations are:

- Amending the constitution to alter the number of legislative votes required to place a local constitutional amendment on a statewide ballot
- Amending the constitution to provide for county commissions to exercise certain administrative powers without requirement of local legislation
- Amending the constitution to alter the process for passing local bills by reducing the advertising requirement and allowing for amendment of local

bills during the legislative process

While all three of these proposals are important, the proposed changes to the local bill process are perhaps the most significant. Under the current system for passage of local legislation, a local bill is advertised for four weeks prior to introduction and then must pass the Legislature in the identical form it was introduced. Substantive changes made following advertisement are prohibited, meaning any local bill amended during the legislative process can easily be declared unconstitutional once it becomes law.

The inability to amend a local bill, in effect, eliminates any ability to negotiate a piece of legislation or engage in any meaningful debate on the substance of the bill. If local legislation is introduced that will be harmful to a county, the county and local legislators cannot work together to address county concerns unless the legislator agrees to pull the bill or re-advertise with requested changes included. In most instances, time prevents the legislator from starting over with advertisement of a new agreed-to bill, and the legislation passes without the needed changes.

Citizens also have no real voice in local legislation, even though the purpose of advertising local bills is to put citizens on notice about proposals that will impact them. Unless the legislator agrees to changes which will require new advertising, the citizen has little say in these proposals and will be bound by the local act as originally proposed should the bill become law.

Even legislators are disadvantaged

under the current system. Because there is no method to resolve substantive problems with language in a bill once it has been advertised and introduced, a legislator opposing a particular local bill must affirmatively contest the bill or utilize delaying tactics to prevent consideration and passage on the House or Senate floor. The bill's sponsor cannot make any changes to remove opposition to the bill. Therefore, a contested local bill frequently does not pass.

Although the constitution prohibits substantive changes to local bills, it is not uncommon for the Legislature to amend such bills in the hopes that the changes will be viewed as technical in nature. It is also not uncommon, however, for a local bill to be amended with the hope that it will be declared invalid by a court once it becomes law. This can prove very dangerous for counties, particularly where the local law levies a new tax or fee. There are many instances where an amended local act has been successfully challenged following its passage. Once declared unconstitutional by the court, the county then faces the possibility of having to refund all monies collected under the invalid local law.

The changes proposed by the Constitutional Revision Commission will, if accepted by the Legislature and the people, eliminate many of the problems outlined above. A local bill will still be advertised prior to introduction, but the advertisement will provide only an overview of the proposed legislation. The exact wording of the bill will not be required.

More importantly, the Commission's recommended changes will specifically allow for amendment of a local bill during the legislative process. Once an

amendment is proposed, the bill will be carried over for three legislative days to allow for consideration of the proposed amendment. The amendment will be available for review by legislators, county officials, and citizens of the county. This will ensure that all interested parties have an opportunity to consider the impact of proposed changes and to contact the bill's sponsor regarding those proposed changes. Under this system, counties will have a much better opportunity to work out issues with their legislative delegation and citizens will be able to participate in the process. These changes will also benefit legislators -- particularly in larger delegations -- since meaningful deliberation and negotiation on local legislation will be allowed and there will be less need to "kill" a local bill.

Because counties have only that authority granted to them by the

Legislature, local legislation is vitally important to every county in the state. It is also important to legislators since it is often aimed at addressing a legislator's priorities for his or her district. And since the decisions of the county and local legislators impact all citizens in the county, local legislation can be very important to those citizens as well. It is frustrating that the legislative vehicle used to address local issues involves a cumbersome and ineffective process that often prohibits passage of laws in the best interest of the county. The changes recommended by the Constitutional Revision Commission will significantly improve this process for the county commission, each local legislative delegation, and all citizens of this state. It will be incumbent on all county officials to help educate both the legislature and the citizens that this is a change we should all support.



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Coffee @ the Courthouse builds relationships

When President Debbie Wood outlined a plan for county officials and legislators to enjoy some “coffee” at the courthouse, her vision for jumpstarting county government’s legislative initiatives may not have been clear to everyone.

“We are going to ask you to sit down with your legislators, over coffee, there in your courthouse to provide more insight into daily operation of the county and why each and every legislator should stand more actively with us to protect and enhance counties,” she said at the Annual Convention in August.

The idea began to take shape with detailed discussions during the Association’s district meetings in October. And the project was kicked into high gear with the first Coffee @ the Courthouse in Etowah County on Nov. 4.

The concept was to provide an opportunity for all county officials – including commissioners, sheriffs, probate judges and tax officials – to gather with their legislators in a casual setting to discuss the issues expected to hit counties during the 2014 session. The events were organized loosely along the state Senate districts, with a total of 19 events scheduled statewide through November and December.

“I want to thank the Association for organizing this event,” state Sen. Gerald Dial, R- Lineville, told the group gathered at the Chambers County Courthouse. “With six counties in



Chambers County Commission Chair Debbie Wood, who is also the 2013-14 president of ACCA, emphasizes a point to legislators attending Coffee @ the Courthouse.

my district, it would take me weeks to be able to meet face-to-face with the elected officials from every county. I already knew about most of your issues, but the discussion today will really help me when the session begins in January.”

Each host county provided the meeting location, coffee and other refreshments to help encourage conversation. A representative of the host county provided an outline of the Association’s legislative priorities for the year and then a representative of each of the other elected officials was given the opportunity to discuss any specific legislative goals or concerns from their perspective.

As the Association seeks to encourage better communication and a stronger working relationship among the county elected officials – each with its own separate association – the value of the coffee events extended well beyond one

morning in the courthouse, Wood said.

“We hope this is the beginning of something that can be an annual event and that all the county elected officials can pull together more effectively in Montgomery,” Wood explained.

One of the issues discussed during the meeting in Chambers County was the Legislature’s reversal on an Association-sponsored bill from 2012 aimed at eliminating an abusive tax exemption process resulting in more than 20 percent of all homesteads in Alabama completely escaping taxation. Chambers County Revenue Commissioner Wendy Williams encouraged legislators to reconsider the repeal of the Association’s legislation and pointed out that the undocumented exemptions are unfair to those who really deserve tax assistance.

Sheriffs discussed a number of issues related to law enforcement, including problems arising from the holding and

News You Can Use

transportation of persons with mental health issues and the impact the state's new sentencing reform guidelines will have on the always overcrowded county jails.

And probate judge representatives made legislators aware of the need to address a growing problem with write-in ballots, which Alabama law requires to be counted on election night. The Association expects to assist in the passage of legislation to delay the counting until after Election Day and to eliminate the need to count write-in ballots that cannot impact the outcome of the election.

"I honestly had reservations as to how effective these meetings might be but now realize that this one served



When Lee County hosted four neighboring counties from east Alabama for coffee, the gathering of county leaders drew a crowd of state legislators. Pictured, from left, are Rep. Mark Tuggle, Speaker Mike Hubbard, Rep. Duwayne Bridges, Sen. Billy Beasley and Sen. Gerald Dial.

as a platform to not only express our concerns to our legislators but an opportunity to network with our

legislative delegation and other county officials," said Henry County Chair and Probate Judge David Money.

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Policy Teams tackle legislative details together

Though some may see the start of the 2014 legislative session as the “same old story,” the Association of County Commissions of Alabama is preparing for Jan. 14 with a new -- and more clearly focused -- approach.

For many years ACCA has utilized large steering committees that were expected to take a detailed look at the content of the ACCA Legislative Program. But, in practice, the very detailed document was not closely reviewed because of the sheer size of the document.

Enter the Association’s new Policy Teams -- organized around specific legislative issues in the fall of 2013 and designed to give the membership

ACCA Policy Teams

- Alabama Trust Fund
- Business License Reform
- Constitutional Revision
- Elections
- Emergency Issues
- Employee Benefits
- Environmental Issues
- General County Administration
- Justice & Public Safety
- Local Transportation Issues
- Public Works Law
- Revenue Protection

a policy document more detailed and productive. As the Association works to have the proposed Legislative Program ready for final approval at the Legislative Conference in Birmingham in December, the Policy Teams are at the center of almost daily activity.

The teams initially held organizational meetings in September; narrowed their focus to specific issues and policy wording later that month and then formalized recommendations to the ACCA Legislative Committee in November. Most of the work has been through conference calls that have made it easier for all members to participate.

“When we arrive at the Legislative Conference, I believe we’ll have a proposed program that more closely reflects the expertise of our membership,” explained ACCA President Debbie Wood. “I am very excited that the Policy Teams will also be a very productive part of our Legislative advocacy in 2014.”

The work of the Policy Teams will not end with the approval of the formal legislative document, the members will be asked to attend legislative committee meetings and to even participate in negotiating sessions on specific legislation. The input of members who work and serve at the county level will also be a new resource for the Association.

In fact, this has already started with Policy Teams providing input and advice on draft legislation impacting the vacation of county roads, the state’s so-called “Call Before You Dig” law and reform of the state’s business license process. The input of these teams has been invaluable.

The teams have also branched out to include other county officials representing the sheriffs, tax officials and probate judges.

The Association’s Legislative Committee, composed of all active Association past presidents and elected members from each of the Association’s 12 districts, will review the recommendations of the teams and forward a comprehensive draft of the Legislative Program to the ACCA Board of Directors and eventually to the membership.

“Our legislative effort will come into sharp focus with the adoption of the legislative program in December,” said Ricky Harcrow, chair of the ACCA Legislative Committee. “But the real work now rests with the policy teams. We’re excited about this change and believe it will benefit all counties.”

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High-tech ACCA driving simulator toured state

The steering wheel and the 733 people behind it were real, but the challenging situations designed to improve safety and avoid accidents were all computer-generated.

Over seven weeks this fall, county sheriff's deputies and road and sanitation employees spent a portion of their day sitting behind the controls of a driving simulator designed to strengthen their skills and better prepare them for the challenges they face on the road every day.

The simulator, housed in a large trailer and leased by the Association's insurance funds, was driven to seven different locations around the state – often operating all through the night to offer the hands-on training to workers at convenient times. The state-of-the-art facility allowed for the computer-



J.D. Smith, engineer in Macon County, takes the simulator for a whirl.

simulated dashboard and controls to be changed to mirror different kinds of vehicles, including large dump-style trucks and emergency response vehicles.

Association staff coordinated with county deputies and road and bridge

employees to operate the simulator, which allowed the operators to change weather conditions, insert unexpected

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Simulator *continued from p. 13*

challenges and distractions and provide the employees with situations they may face on any given day. The project is all part of the insurance funds' renewed emphasis on safety training and accident prevention.

"In the last few years we have focused a great deal of time, effort and money to provide counties with the tools to reduce or avoid accidents," said Sonny Brasfield, the Association's executive director. "Certainly these projects translate to a reduction in insurance costs for the counties, but more importantly is the protection of the health of our employees and the drivers of other vehicles."

In Baldwin County, 131 employees participated in the training, with 78

road and bridge employees and 53 deputies polishing their skills. When the simulator stopped in Lee County, more than 120 persons from the surrounding counties were trained.

Other stops along the way included Etowah, Colbert, Dallas, Monroe and Dale counties. Coordinating the the simulator's movement, scheduling drivers from 57 counties and training the operators were major tasks that took cooperation from counties, sheriffs and the Association staff, Brasfield explained.

"We were very pleased with the participation, especially since this was our first attempt at providing this kind of training," said ACCA Director of Insurance Services Henry van Arcken.

"We have gotten many calls from counties that have volunteered to be a host for the project next year. And we are very excited about the opportunities of reducing accidents through better training.

We learned a great deal about scheduling and using our time as wisely as possible. Next year we hope to put 1,000 people behind the wheel, so to speak."

Because the law enforcement and highway departments produce the lion's share of the automobile accidents, van Arcken said the training was targeted to address the most pressing need. But next year employees from other departments will be given the chance to participate.



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Counties complete cycle of ATRIP announcements



News cameras roll as Madison County Commission Chairman Dale Strong, flanked by local officials and state legislators, tells of ATRIP's impact throughout the county.

Local events highlight how the billion-dollar program reaches every corner of Alabama

The ATRIP Status Report in early October made one thing perfectly clear— county government is going to be extremely busy over the next few years.

With more than \$1 billion in road and bridge construction projects announced for local governments, the brainchild of Gov. Robert Bentley promises to be the single largest infusion of road and bridge dollars in the history of Alabama. But until the “Status Report,” the two years of talk and news conferences about the program seemed to be little more than project names and dollar signs.

“The goal of the Status Report was to put this program into human terms,” said Association President Debbie

Wood. “We asked counties to put a ‘face’ on their local projects -- and they spoke loud and long. For two days there was little buzz about anything other than ATRIP.”

The local ATRIP Status Reports generated more than 60 different instances of news media coverage, dominating print and broadcast reports that week, for the program formally known as the Alabama Transportation Rehabilitation and Improvement Program.

In all, at least 48 counties participated in the effort to bring attention to the local impact of each project, outlining how each road resurfacing or bridge replacement will improve safety, economic development, community stability and education. Most of the events were held on Oct. 9 and involved county and city leaders along with legislators and other officials.

In Madison County, the event included most of the area’s state representatives and senators. In Barbour, the event attracted community attention and involved city and county officials who outlined the impact of the dozen projects in that community.

ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield explained that the statewide focus was offered by the Association as a way to announce the third -- and final -- set of ATRIP projects. Several county engineers worked to develop standard project maps to ensure consistency at the various events. Likewise, the group also created standard charts outlining details on each project.

“It was important that the local events be part of a statewide effort to make

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Fayette County Assistant Engineer, Luke Porter, is interviewed by Crystal Foster, editor of the local paper, the Times Record.

From the Cover

What they are saying... leaders praise ATRIP, Governor Bentley

“This is the only thing in my lifetime that has put this kind of money at the city and the county level and let the locals select the projects, so we’ve got to give all the credit to the governor. Former governors, I’m sure they like to help cities and counties, but we’ve never seen anything on this magnitude.”

Randy Cole, Shelby County engineer, *al.com*

“Once all bridges are replaced, we won’t have a county bridge that a school bus can’t cross.”

Ben Duncan, Lawrence County engineer, *Decatur Daily*

“We want everyone in Sumter County to understand the profound impact of ATRIP on our area and on your ability to get to school and work. These improvements will immediately benefit our citizens and our economy, and I’d like to personally thank Gov. Robert Bentley for this wise investment in our local transportation system.”

Marcus Campbell, chairman of the Sumter County Commission, *Sumter County Record-Journal*

“I want to thank the governor for putting this program forward, the (Talladega County Commission) for doing all the legwork and the delegation for coming together and making these projects possible. A lot of these projects have been needed for a long time.”

State Rep. Steve Hurst, *The Daily Home*

“We’re not only going to be able to repair it but make the entire roadway safer for the community.”

Jeff Overstreet, Etowah County Commissioner, *The Gadsden Times*
(referring to the oldest bridge in the county, built in 1917)

“Normally we receive about \$500,000 per year. We are receiving 20 years of projects in one year.”

George Jones, Dallas County engineer, *The Selma Times Journal*

“With our present budget situation, there was no way we could have done this, nor (could) the cities have done this on their own.”

Tony Petelos, Jefferson County manager, *al.com*

“The commission, in partnership with the city, has done a good job of coming together to bring this money to Pike County. This could not have happened without a good working relationship between the two.”

Marcus Paramore, City of Troy, *Troy Messenger*

“The size of this program is amazing.”

Bill English, Lee County Commission chair and probate judge, *Opelika-Auburn News*

“Not only does it mean better infrastructure for Lee County, it also means jobs. It’s really going to be great for the entire state.”

Alabama House Speaker Mike Hubbard, *Opelika-Auburn News*

“For us to get that money, we – and that means the county, Andalusia and Opp – had to commit a 20 percent match. We were thrilled to get funded. Infrastructure is the key to economic development, and this money helps all of us with projects to promote our respective infrastructure.”

Bill Godwin, Covington County Commission chairman, *Andalusia Star News*

“The money for these projects greatly accelerated the completion of projects that were needed for the safety and development of Chilton County.”

Tony Wearren, Chilton County engineer, *The Clanton Advertiser*

“This is going to do away with a lot of deficient bridges in a 2-to-3 year period. We did get all the projects we asked for, and part of the reason for this is that we all worked together.”

Richard Sanders, Limestone County engineer, *The News Courier*

“This program will have an historic and important impact on the people in the state of Alabama. We all understand the importance of urban roads and the interstate, but there comes a time when you have to fix the roads getting to the interstate.”

David Palmer, Franklin County engineer, *Franklin County Times*

From the Cover

ATRIP *continued from p. 16*

the public aware that ATRIP will impact their community in a positive way,” Brasfield explained. “Sometimes big numbers can be overwhelming but when you hear about a specific road or bridge you understand that you will benefit from all this effort.”

And speaking of effort, counties are expected to work on the projects for months to come. In all, the program includes more than 1,100 road and bridge projects funded with bond proceeds. In sheer numbers, road projects dominate bridge projects two to one. Counties landed three of every four projects, with cities and other governmental entities making up the rest.



ATRIP came along at just the right time to help with infrastructure needs for Airbus, a major new economic development project in Mobile County, according to Commissioner Connie Hudson.

The annual bond payments will be made with federal highway dollars, and the local governments are required to provide a match equal to 20 percent of the project cost. However, 21 counties signed up for the Rural Assistance Match Program, or RAMP, to help with match expenses.

The ribbon cuttings began with the completion of a resurfacing project in Henry County that connects two state highways. Over the next two years, newly resurfaced roads and new bridges

will be opened to traffic in every county in Alabama.

“This isn’t a program that ended with the press conferences,” Brasfield concluded. “Over the next two years there will be much more attention focused on the projects. In the meantime, county officials, county employees and employees at the Alabama Department of Transportation will have their hands full with all the details necessary to make the projects happen.”



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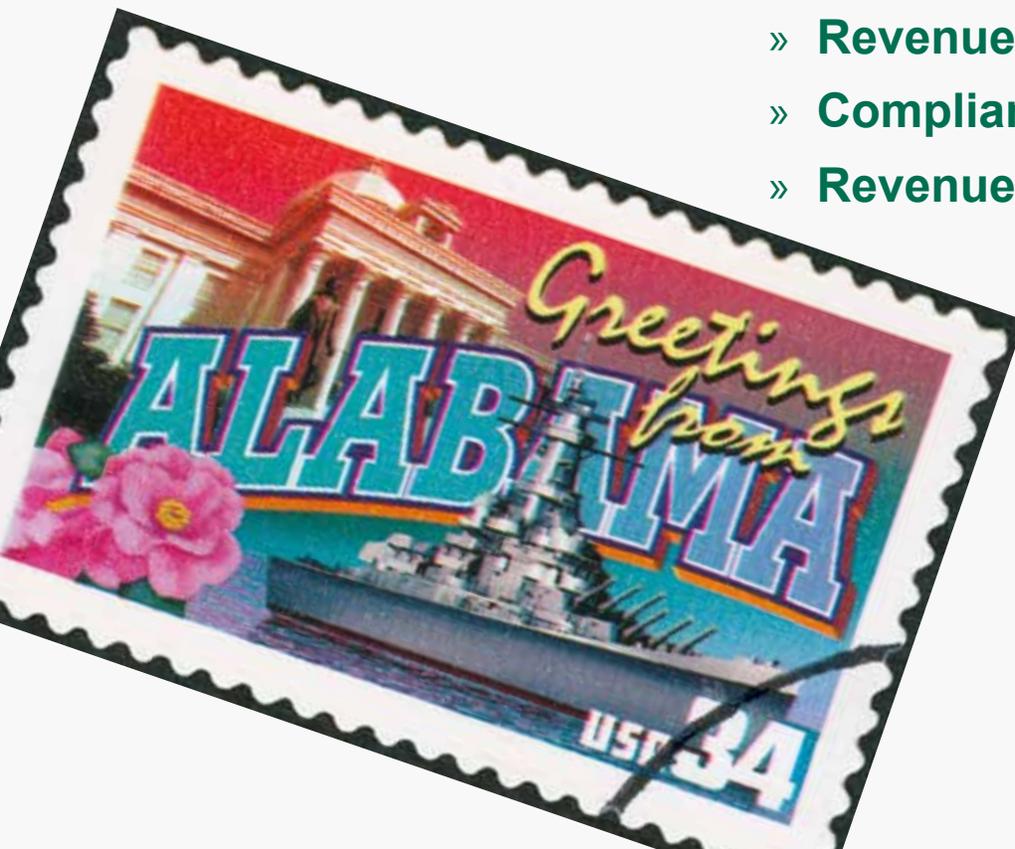
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Culver of Houston County tapped for top honor



Mark Culver

Houston County Commission Chairman Mark Culver has been honored with the 2013 Outstanding Contribution to County Government Award from the Association of County Commissions. This is the highest honor given by the Association, and it is designed to recognize unselfish commitment to the betterment of county government throughout the state.

Culver was first elected to the Houston County Commission in 1986, and he has been active in ACCA throughout his career, serving as president in 2001.

“Mark Culver literally embodies what this award is all about. He is not satisfied with excellence and advancement for his own home county, but he consistently takes the lead at the state level on critical issues for all 67 of Alabama’s counties,” said ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield. “Whether we’re working on prison overcrowding or the local sales tax system or myriad other issues, counties

can count on him.”

Culver said he was surprised and deeply honored to receive the award. “When I served on the ACCA awards committee

years ago and voted on the recipient of this award each year, I hoped I could live up to the ideals of the award but never thought I would receive it.”



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Elmore County innovates with pavement preservation

The Elmore County Commission has been honored with the 2013 Excellence in County Government Award from the Association of County Commissions of Alabama for a program called “Innovation through Preservation.”

The award recognizes innovative and effective programs implemented by the commission itself and not its agencies or boards.

“Counties do a great deal of excellent work above and beyond normal services that often goes unnoticed,” said ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield.

Maintaining a large network of roads and bridges with limited resources is a common challenge, and Elmore County employs an large array of strategies to extend the life of pavement, in some cases as much as 10 years. These strategies include techniques such as fog seal, chip seal, plant mix overlay, slurry seal and micro surfacing.

The commission has leveraged the knowledge gained from



The Elmore County Commission accepts the 2013 Excellence in County Government Award presented by 2012-2013 ACCA President Ricky Harcrow. Pictured are, from left, Chairman David Bowen, Commissioner Stephanie Daniels-Smoke, Commissioner Joe Faulk, Harcrow and County Engineer Richie Beyer.

the county engineer’s participation in national training programs to bring in treatments that had not been widely used in Alabama. Also to the county’s credit, it has been generous about sharing its research and innovations with others around Alabama by hosting demonstrations and presenting at statewide conferences.

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President's Corner

continued from p. 5

serve your county. This was the first step in the development of our new strategic plan. This process will continue in the coming months as we prepare – together – to map the Association's goals and initiatives to take us into the next decade. We will need your active participation.

While here you have also heard about the Citizens Academy program that we are asking you to consider as part of our efforts to raise the awareness of county government at the grassroots level. The project is designed to begin this fall and to culminate with National County Government Week in April. It may be a bit ambitious for some of you – to identify community leaders who will attend several meetings to learn more about county government – but we are truly convinced that this project will enhance public support for county government if you will consider the investment of time and energy necessary.

We are changing our approach to the Association's Steering Committees to develop smaller groups of officials and

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employees who are engaged and knowledgeable on the subject areas that will be legislative priorities this session. We are seeking volunteers who will give of their time and energy to benefit not only their county, but all of county government.

And the next program is one I am excited to announce. In the coming weeks you will hear about a program to help educate our legislators on what is going on in our courthouses. I believe we can be more effective – both collectively and individually – if our senators and representatives have a firsthand knowledge of what we do at the county level. So during our district meetings this year we are going to outline a plan for a statewide Coffee at the Courthouse. We will provide the tools you need to make this happen, but we are going to ask you to sit down with your legislators, over coffee, there in your courthouse to provide more insight into daily

operation of your county and why each and every legislator should stand more actively with us to protect and enhance counties. We need to share our story.

I ask that you attend the district meetings later this fall and that your county participate in Coffee at the Courthouse prior to the 2014 regular session of the Alabama Legislature.

And this year’s legislative session promises to be one of extreme challenges and unique opportunities. You have always answered the call when we’ve needed you in Montgomery, and I know that will continue this year. But this session, perhaps more than any other in recent memory, we hope to engage every one of you in some important way.

In closing, I hope you will sit back and enjoy some coffee as I share a small part of the story of Chambers County. ... As *continued on p. 28*

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President's Corner

continued from p. 27

I looked for inspiration for tonight's speech, I really did not have to look very far. Our hometown hero provided much inspiration, Joe Louis Barrow.

He was born in Chambers County, and many of you may know him as the Brown Bomber. He was the heavyweight champion of the world

from 1937 to 1949.

He is considered to be one of the greatest heavyweights of all time. Although he moved at 11, his formative years were spent in our county.

Life was not easy for Joe Louis.

Joe began life with a speech

impediment, his father was placed in a mental institution when he was a child and he was uprooted and moved when he was 11. During his boxing career there were many highs and also lows. He did not win every battle. In fact he lost many fights before he became the heavyweight champion. He married four times, had to overcome serious financial difficulties and many have reported he died a broke man. I know what you are thinking – he was broke because he had four wives.

Regardless of his struggles, Joe Louis was a winner in the ring and in life. In 2009 a statue was placed outside our courthouse in his honor. Our community raised \$60,000 for this statue. Although the statue is beautiful, I have been more moved by the words printed on the base and thus my inspiration for tonight's speech. The words read: Joe Louis Barrow, an inspiration to his race, the human race. We are all part of the race. We must not let party politics or gender or the demographics of our counties whether we are large or small, old battle wounds or the color of our skin keep us from completing this race. No time for looking back.

There will only be time for us to focus on pulling together – collectively – to protect and enhance county government. Every one of us has a role to play in our success. And we have a legacy of cooperation and teamwork that has lead us to the position of prominence we hold in this state.

It is our responsibility together to look toward the future – not the past – and to forge a path based on the betterment of all 67 counties.

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