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COUNTY COMMISSION

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A portrait of Randy Vest, a man with white hair, a goatee, and glasses, wearing a dark suit, a light pink shirt, and a patterned tie. He is standing outdoors in front of a building and trees. A large white rectangular box is positioned in the bottom left corner of the image.

**RANDY
VEST**

2020-2021 ACCA President



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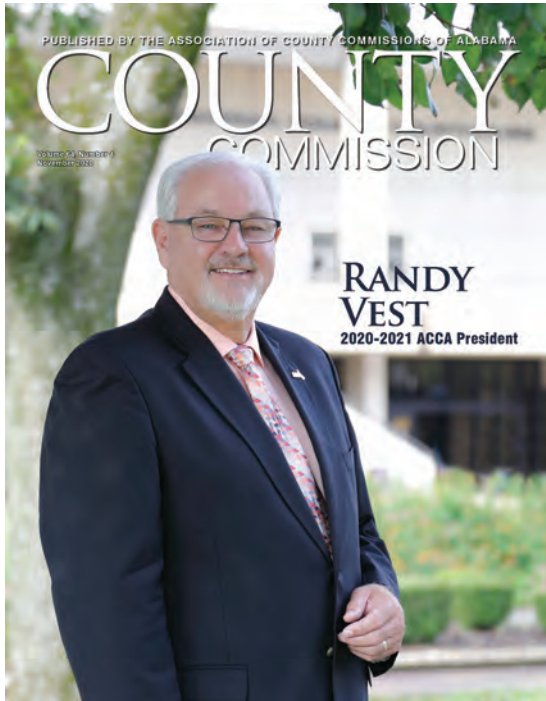
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in this issue

VOLUME 64, NUMBER 4



Commissioners who commit their passion, service and common vision can energize and improve the quality of life for Alabama counties and this Association, says 2020-2021 President Randy Vest. (Photo: Ellis Chenault)

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President's PERSPECTIVE



Hon. Randy Vest
President

Let Us Play Well the Parts We Are Given

In Unusual Times, Our Mission Remains the Same

*Editor's Note: This is
the prepared text
of Randy Vest's
inaugural address.*

This is certainly an unusual setting and an unusual place for us to conclude our 92nd Annual Convention.

Normally, I would be slipping out the back door at this time to make final preparations for tonight's banquet. My wife would normally be joining now; and our 3 children, their spouses and our 10 grandchildren, along with my mother, had made plans to be with me as I accepted this truly humbling honor — and challenge. But, as we know, there is nothing "normal" about our world today. And there's nothing "normal" about the time we have spent together today or the way we have been forced to conduct this convention.

In fact, I am convinced there will be very little that any of us will consider "normal" between today and next August. But our challenge together is the same as it has always been. COVID-19 and the upheaval it has generated for our counties, for our families, for our state, for our Association and for our country has not altered the mission that we undertake together over the next 12 months. Our mission is exactly the same.

As I look out in our audience, I see many former presidents of the Association — spanning From Roger Hayes and Mark Culver, who led this organization as back-to-back presidents more than two decades ago, to my close friend David Money who has just, figuratively, passed the gavel to me. Each president faced his or her own set of unique circumstances, but each had the exact same mission. And it is the same mission that I pledge, with all that is within me, to carry out — with your partnership and commitment.

Like most of you, I never came to county government with a plan to serve in a leadership position in this Association. This is just something that has evolved because I have been active; I have seen what this Association can accomplish; and I felt a responsibility to "Get in the Game" (to borrow the theme from Steve McKinnon's year as president) and to do my part to carry on the mission.

I remember at an early age a lesson my Mom taught in "servant leadership." I was raised in a small country church with all day singings and dinner on the grounds. After one such event, my mother asked me to go back to church with her. Being curious, I asked "What for?" Her reply was to take out the garbage. I remember asking why we had to take out the garbage. She answered, "Someone has to." I never heard Mom tell anyone that she was the one doing this, nor did I hear her complain about it. She simply saw the need and worked to solve it.

I've learned a lot about service and a joyous life from my Mom. She will be 82 on August 27 and still approaches life with Colossians 3:23-24 as her "mission statement."

"And whatsoever ye do, do it as to the Lord."

I would like to preface the rest of my comments by inserting Jeremiah 29:11. I think it will become evident why.

"For I know the PLANS that I have for you."

As we begin this mission together, I am reminded that the formation of our current leadership team really began back in 2010 and was solidified with the election of Ricky Harcrow as our Association president on this day in 2012. My story — and the story of our entire leadership team — illustrates what

this Association is about, why we have been so successful and just how we can continue to be successful together — even in the face of the massive challenges we will meet over the next 12 months.

In November of 2010, Marcus Campbell and I were elected county commissioners for the first time. Neither of us knew what we had gotten into or what was in store for us in the years ahead. The two of us met for the first time in December of that year at the Association's orientation. Sonny and the staff talked to us about our responsibilities, the importance of leadership and the need to develop a family approach to the "Class of 2010."

Over the next two years, we completed the training programs and — seemingly — went our separate ways back to our home counties in Sumter and Morgan. Then, at our convention in 2012, I sat at the banquet as Chairman Harcrow laid out a roadmap for a leadership program that would take second-term commissioners and plant the seeds of passion and accountability. I was interested — but I knew I needed to get re-elected. You see, in Morgan County District 2, there had been five commissioners in the 10 years before me. A turnover was commonplace, and I knew that I had to break that cycle.

After facing four opponents, the voters saw fit to return me to office in 2014, and I joined the first class of our leadership program, known to all of us now as PLAN. The letters stand for Passion, Leadership, Accountability and Networking. For the next 18 months, we worked collectively and individually to understand the cost — and the responsibility — of accepting leadership, channeling our passion, holding each other accountable and networking to grow ourselves and others.



2020-2021 ACCA President Randy Vest, at right, accepted the gavel from outgoing president David Money during the ONE Voice Session of the 92nd Convention in August.

We were asked to accept and carry a coin that would be an outward symbol of commitment to ourselves, to our communities and to each other. We all accepted the coin and put it into our pockets.

Our President-Elect Marcus Campbell was part of that first leadership program with me, and Vice President Jay Thompson participated in the next class, PLAN 2018. Today, we stand together as a unified — and prepared — leadership team to carry out the mission that has been passed to us.

We are a product of what is so special and so amazingly remarkable about this organization. An idea borne by a veteran commission chairman — someone who has forgotten more about leadership than I will ever know — has produced a leadership team that has come to you today still carrying our symbol of commitment to each other, to this Association, to our communities and to our state.

Here's my coin — a 1929 Walking Liberty Half Dollar — that I was given in January of 2015.

The coin symbolizes our Association's mission as it was minted in 1929 — the actual year that a group of county commissioners established this Association and set the foundation for the mission that's before us today. The coin symbolizes our pledge to make a difference at home and inside this Association.

When we started our journey together in 2015, the two of us never talked about or anticipated the accomplishments and obstacles that have arisen since. We just made a vow to make a real difference.

Our mission statement from 2015 is as relevant today as it was then, when the members made a vow to:

"Collectively enhance their passion, service and common vision to overcome conflict, divisiveness and limited resources in order to energize

Continued on Page 8



Sonny Brasfield
Executive Director

Sonny Brasfield

We Can Still Count on Each Other

**For Decades,
Counties Have
Been Busily
Getting Ready for
Challenging Times**

The voice on the other end of the line apologized for calling “after hours,” but the call helped me refocus and realize that — even amid the craziness of 2020 — the county community is doing one thing right.

Amid the tragic circumstances in the aftermath of Hurricane Sally, the caller was offering help. “We have several men and plenty of equipment,” the voice said. “We just need to know where we are needed.”

The caller was a veteran commissioner who has actively and publically supported the Association’s efforts over the years. But he isn’t a member of any ACCA boards or committees. He’s not been a part of our leadership program. He’s not a frequent speaker in our training programs. But he’s watched others, and he was now raising his hand and stepping forward.

He was also sending me a message I needed to hear — not on purpose, of course.

He was just calling to help respond to the damage in a county — far away — that needed his help. His admission that he didn’t know the Commissioners in South Alabama very well only made it easier for me to smile, and recharge, after we ended the conversation.

I gave him some names. He promised to call. I thanked him for helping turn an otherwise “COVID-bad” day into a teaching moment. I’m not sure he even understood how helpful his call was at the end of one of those challenging days.

Just the morning before, I was on a County Engineers text chain that was initiated by an Engineer

with no damage in his county. He was offering help and checking on the damage in South Alabama. For several hours, the Engineers exchanged descriptions of damage, the possible need for assistance and photos of the aftermath.

The call and the group text reminded me that what we do every day is rooted in relationships and responsibility. Counties have flourished during these most challenging of times because of the relationships and expertise that were built during times of success.

Today, I can smile about all the hours County Employees have invested in training and in their affiliate organizations. And all the hard work of the Association staff members — those with us now and those who have moved on to other stations — that has fostered a culture of unity and community.

Without those relationships and without the expertise that has been gained by learning together — and from each other — well, I’m not sure where we would be today. It is quite possible that the challenges of 2020 might have crippled counties — if not for the preparation that has been underway for a long, long time.

When this is over and people ask why they should invest their time and energy and their county’s money and personnel into participation, I am going to point to the call, to the group text and to counties’ ability to continue to provide outstanding service and leadership despite the circumstances.

Those two simple acts illustrate so clearly what we’ve been nurturing for so long. We’ve been getting ready

for these challenging times — we just didn't realize it.

There is nothing new about this kind of response. Honestly, it happens every time there is a disaster. It's not just Commissioners and Engineers. Administrators, Emergency Management Directors, 9-1-1 Directors, Sheriffs and so many others always respond when their "neighbors" — even those hundreds of miles away — are confronting a challenge.

In the face of the most destructive pandemic in more than a century, this is one thing that has not changed. Even though we can't hold training sessions; even though we can't sit across the table and talk through the issues facing our 67 counties; even though we can't be together in any "normal" sense of the word —

Counties can still count on

It is quite possible that the challenges of 2020 might have crippled counties — if not for the preparation that has been underway for a long, long time.

each other.

It's almost impossible for anyone to realistically guess what will happen next. When can people enter the courthouse without wearing masks? When will the Department of Public Health shut down the website that tracks new COVID-19 cases? When will the confusing details and requirements of CARES Act funding be in our rearview mirror?

If only we had the answers or could find someone who could

actually give us insight into what happens next — but instead, we keep moving forward; we lean on each other; and we search for promising signs wherever we can find them.

In the past two decades, the course and influence of county government has changed dramatically. And with it has come responsibility — to the citizens, to the Association and to each other. Pulling back, in the face of this pandemic or anything else, is not an option. And it won't be going forward.

Counties, and this Association, must deliver our services, assist the citizens, provide a pathway to recovery and get ready for the next challenge. And, as I was reminded the other night, we can never lose sight of our partners and friends who have helped us all speak with ONE Voice — even when we haven't been sure exactly what to do or where to go. ■

2020 Tenure in Office AWARDS

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20 Years

Hon. Jesse McWilliams, Butler
Hon. Wendell Byrd, Conecuh
Hon. John Underwood, Fayette
Hon. Roger Jones, Madison
Hon. Cattie Epps, Russell

16 Years

Hon. Joe Headley, Chilton
Hon. Drew Thompson Jr., Macon
Hon. Peggy Martin, Russell



Continued from page 5

and improve the quality of life for Alabama counties and this Association.”

After that experience and all of our work since then — back home and in this Association — here we are. Two “Walkers,” as we called ourselves, and a “Wing” from the next class, together asking you to “walk” with us so we can energize and improve the quality of life for Alabama counties and this Association.

We have so many issues to face — together. We can all name them in our sleep — inmate overcrowding, implementation of Rebuild Alabama, stronger representation on the retirement systems board, enhancement of our emergency response efforts, rebounding from the COVID-19 pandemic, expanding the utilization of technology for a more efficient county government, and so many others.

But today, as we close this most unusual convention — in this most unusual year — I want us to focus on our “usual” theme — that the mission of this Association is to provide leadership for this state and to produce leaders who are committed to fulfilling that mission.

Our third PLAN leadership class is nearing the close of its journey. And our outgoing President, David Money, and our new Minority Director, Bertha Kelly-McElrath, are part of that group of 11 amazing leaders.

At its last meeting, those commission members talked a great deal about the many “parts” that each of them has been required to play over the past two years. The “part” — or role — that each of you plays today is radically different from the role you had expected to play just 12 months ago. Amen??

And I dare say that the roles we will play together over the next year will change again, and again.



In continuation of a long-standing tradition, the Alabama Association of County Agricultural Agents and Specialists presented Alabama-produced hams to ACCA's President and President-Elect during the 92nd Convention.

The quote discussed by this year's PLAN group — known, I think, as the Elite 11 — was actually from a Roman thinker just a few years after the resurrection of Jesus. The quote describes the many roles that a person can be given during a lifetime — some desirable roles; some not so desirable; some roles that are easy; some that are difficult. In the end, the quote concludes:

“For this is your business — to act **well** the given part, but to choose the part belongs to another.”

I don't know what part each of you will be given in the next 12 months. I don't even know what part I will be given. I'm certain that David Money had no idea of the part he would play this year. After all, the assignment of each part comes from God.

But my pledge — and challenge — to you as we depart this afternoon is the same challenge that

my PLAN partners have made to themselves this year.

To the best of my ability, I will play **well** the part that I am given. I will commit my passion, service and common vision to overcome conflict, divisiveness and limited resources so that we can, together energize and improve the quality of life for Alabama counties and this Association.

I need you to play **well** the part that you are given — whatever that turns out to be. Together, with thanks to all those who have come before, we'll carry on the mission that was set when this Association began in 1929 and this coin began its travels so that it could land in my pocket and remind us all of the responsibility we have over the next 12 months.

Thank you. Travel safe. Rest, and then be ready. Our mission is clear, and there is much work to do. Now, I need to see if the garbage needs to be taken out.

May God bless you all...■



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Dale County Hailed for Arts Innovation

The 92nd Convention marked the debut of ACCA's Efficiency and Innovation in County Government Award, and the Dale County Commission took home the prize in the Rural Category.

The winning entry, titled "Quality of Life," was a unique, Commission-led effort to build an amphitheater in downtown Ozark. The venue opened in August 2019, and it has since not only provided a new home for cultural and community events but also boosted sales tax revenues.

For many years, the county and city had jointly sponsored the Claybank Jamboree, which necessitated renting a large stage and blocking a downtown street. The amphitheater project, as envisioned by Commission Chairman Mark Blankenship, began as a way to cut costs for the Jamboree, the annual Crawdad Festival and a craft beer festival called Ozark on Tap.

The Dale County Commission served as the sponsor for a \$25,000 grant from the Wiregrass Resource Conservation and Development Council Inc., funds that were essential to a "world class venue" with stage lighting and a sound system. Blankenship also serves on the county-wide performing arts council, another significant partner in the project.

Community support made it possible to build the new facility on a modest budget. Three landowners donated vacant property downtown to provide a site, and an entertainment district was established by the city.



"Thanks to some very generous citizens agreeing to participate in work days, the labor to build the amphitheater was free," said Lee Patterson, who chaired ACCA's Awards Committee this year. "Many of the materials used were also donated."

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the amphitheater was regularly booked up for class reunions, church functions, school gatherings, fundraisers, a farmers market, live music and Relay for

Life. The permanent structure, ideal for year-round use, was developed with input from an array of potential users throughout the community.

The Efficiency and Innovation in County Government Award, a spinoff of the former Excellence in County Government Award, is designed to bring statewide attention to outstanding efforts by county government — ranging from innovative approaches for industry recruitment to unique solutions for community problems. ■



ACAA Honors Excellence

The coronavirus pandemic did not stop the annual conference of the Association of County Administrators of Alabama. With proper safety and social distancing protocols in place, members met in late October for two days of professional development at the Renaissance Ross Bridge Resort in Birmingham.

The awards ceremony proved to be a highlight of the gathering, and Gwendolyn Richardson, Monroe County's longtime administrator, was honored as the John Gordon County Administrator of the Year. Richardson is a past president of ACAA. The ACAA Board of Directors recently voted to rename the award in memory of former Fayette County

Administrator John Gordon.


The Association also presented service awards to several members in recognition of their faithful service to county government:

- 35 years — Melvin Vines (Tuscaloosa)
- 25 years — Sonya Kirkwood, CCA (Washington)
- 20 years — Gwendolyn Richardson, CCA (Monroe), and LeAnn Horne, CCA (Russell)
- 10 years — Sherry Lipscomb (Henry)

CCA indicates individuals who have earned the Certified County Administrator designation awarded by the County Government Education Institute. ■



Gwendolyn Richardson



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Elmore County Honored for Broadband Partnership

The Efficiency and Innovation in County Government Award for the Urban Category went to Elmore County for a unique approach to expanding broadband service at a critical time.

The award was presented at the ACCA 92nd Convention in August.

The winning project involved a vast expansion of internet service during the COVID-19 pandemic, when citizens needed connectivity more than ever for virtual classes, telemedicine and work from home. In many ways, the almost-immediate impact was possible because the Elmore County Commission had already given priority to the issue.

“Elmore County is like many counties in Alabama and recognized the need for increased broadband access,” said Lee Patterson, who chaired ACCA’s Awards Committee this year. “The county worked with a company on a study to highlight the strengths and weaknesses in the county and identify possible solutions.”

In fact, when the local school



Amid a public health emergency, free wifi hotspots have been installed in many areas of Elmore County where broadband-speed internet access had been unavailable.

superintendent asked for help locating public wifi for students forced to take their classes from home, the county and local economic development authority were already 18 months into the study.

A few weeks later, Central Alabama Electric Cooperative’s broadband provider began installing wifi hotspots at strategic locations. The provider, Central Access, was able to utilize the co-op’s existing infrastructure.

To maximize community benefit, an interactive map of wifi hotspots became available online showing access points from an array of providers.

On the whole, the project brought together the following major partners: Elmore County Board of Education, Elmore County Commission, Elmore County Economic Development Authority, Central Alabama Electric Cooperative and Central Access.

The Efficiency and Innovation in County Government Award, a spinoff of the former Excellence in County Government Award, is designed to bring statewide attention to outstanding efforts by county government — ranging from innovative approaches for industry recruitment to unique solutions for community problems. ■



Counties:
**AHEAD OF
THE CURVE**

Want to know more?

Access recordings of Convention presentations at AlabamaCounties.org/convention, including a panel discussion on Elmore County’s broadband partnership (Refer to the one-hour mark of the Thursday video).

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Kelly Crowell, ACRMS | Houston
Adam Bourne, ACRMS | Mobile



IN PROFILE

President-Elect Marcus Campbell

Yes, Sumter County Commission Chair Marcus Campbell is really six and a half feet tall. And yes, he really played professional basketball, which means he knows something about teamwork.

“You’ve got to look beyond yourself and always keep your eye on what’s best for the team as a whole,” said Campbell. “That is who we are at the Association of County Commissions of Alabama — just a group of individuals working hard to do whatever we can to make this great state its absolute best.”

Campbell now serves as the Association’s President-Elect after four terms on the Board of Directors as Minority Director. Following the usual officer rotation, he will become president in August 2021.

“Chairman Campbell has already been a valuable member of ACCA’s leadership for many years,” said ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield. “I really got to know him during the PLAN leadership program, and I have every confidence he will continue to well serve all 67 counties in this new role.”

When asked about his goals, the President-Elect said he wants to continue building on the Association’s track record of success, especially initiatives like Rebuild Alabama. From a personal standpoint, “I just want to be a helping hand to any Commissioner, especially our first-term Commissioners,” he said. “There’s so much you can learn about county government and so many opportunities to get involved and improve services and the quality of life for citizens.”

The drive to assist others looking to make a difference comes naturally to Campbell. When asked about himself, Campbell is quick to change the subject, expressing gratitude and naming those who have influenced him — family, coaches, friends, church family, county department heads and legal advisors, as well as County Commissioners at home and around the state.

A native of Sumter’s Lilita community near Coatopa, Campbell played power forward and center at Livingston High School and the University of Alabama, leading him to play eight years of professional basketball in Europe. In the years since,



Get to Know...

Hon. Marcus Campbell
ACCA President-Elect
District 2 Commissioner,
Sumter County

EDUCATION

- Bachelor’s degree in education and human performance, University of Alabama
- Level I Certificate, Alabama Local Government Training Institute

ACCA ENGAGEMENT

- Minority Director, 2016-2020
- Member, PLAN 2016 leadership program

OTHER ENGAGEMENT

- Founder, Marcus Campbell Future Stars Basketball Camp
- Member, National Association of Counties Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee
- **Chairman, Alabama Tombigbee Regional Commission**
- Board Member, West Alabama Food Bank
- Board Member, West Alabama Coalition
- **Chairman of Deacon Board, Mount Tabor Baptist Church**
- Member, Maude Whatley’s Health Board
- President, Sumter County Alumni Association



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marcuscampbell32@gmail.com

his career has included work as a teacher/coach and a pharmaceutical consultant. He established an annual basketball camp nearly 20 years ago, and today he largely devotes his time to county matters.

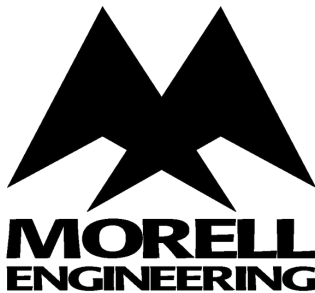
“Being a County Commissioner is a commitment to serve citizens 24 hours a day, 7 days a week,” he said. “In this role, I truly believe you have to be a public servant to the people of your county.”

For recreation, he “attempts to hit a golf ball,” but the activity that really recharges his batteries is the very thing he once wanted to escape.

“I like going out and feeding the cows,” said Campbell, 51, with a trace of self-consciousness. “That answer may sound odd to others — but for me, it provides serenity and peace of mind. I think it’s the Lord’s way of allowing me some downtime to refocus and re-evaluate, which is necessary to move forward and serve with passion.” ■



At the ONE Voice Session of the ACCA 92nd Convention in August, President-Elect Marcus Campbell (at left) and Immediate Past President David Money paused for a photo.



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IN PROFILE

Minority Director Bertha Kelly-McElrath

For the first time in four years, the ACCA membership elected in August a new leader to the Minority Director position — Bertha Kelly-McElrath of Coosa County. Kelly-McElrath succeeds Marcus Campbell of Sumter County, who now serves as President-Elect.

Convention participants may recognize Kelly-McElrath from the Aug. 20 presentation on her PLAN Passion Project — turning part of a long-closed high school into a demonstration kitchen that will provide healthy cooking lessons and other programming to the community.

She made history in 2014 when she became the first female ever elected to the Coosa County Commission, where she now serves as Vice Chair.

“Becoming involved in county government was a spirit-led decision for me,” Kelly-McElrath said. “A small, rural area like Coosa County comes with a lot of hard work, little money and limited resources.”

For 20 years, Kelly-McElrath worked in sales for Russell Athletic, reaching the position of special account coordinator/manager. These days, she is a small business owner, managing a salon. She is married with children and grandchildren. In spare time, she enjoys mentoring, gardening and working with local youth during various sports seasons.

The Minority Director, who is elected to a one-year term, chairs the ACCA Minority Issues Steering Committee, which met virtually in early October to consider legislative goals for the 2021 session. Kelly-McElrath also serves on the ACCA Board of Directors alongside the other Officers, 12 District Representatives and Past Presidents.

“We have to continue to push forward on the issues impacting education, health care and public safety, to name a few. And our goals must be matched with passion and accountability if we are to realize a better future for all,” she said. “My mind and ears will remain open to the input and guidance of my fellow committee members.”

It seems that Kelly-McElrath understood



Get to Know...

Hon. Bertha Kelly-McElrath
ACCA Minority Director
Vice Chair,
Coosa County Commission

EDUCATION

- Bachelor's degree in business, Jacksonville State University
- **Level II Certificate, Alabama Local Government Training Institute**
- Auburn University Basic Economic Development Course (Level I)
- Auburn University Alabama State Economic Development Course (Level II)

ACCA ENGAGEMENT

- Member, PLAN 2020 leadership program
- **Member, Board of Trustees, ACCA Liability Self-Insurance Fund Inc.**
- Past Member, Minority Issues Steering Committee

OTHER ENGAGEMENT

- Member, National Association of Counties Justice and Public Safety Steering Committee
- Board Member, East Alabama Planning Commission
- **Member, Alabama Association of Black County Officials and National Association of Black County Officials**



@CommBerthaM3



(256) 276-1448



kellybertham3@gmail.com

the interrelatedness of counties long before she became a county official. As a child, she had a puzzle of the State of Alabama. Each county was a separate piece, but there was no pattern to guide her hand in positioning them.

“I first had to learn my county’s puzzle piece — and it didn’t take long to recognize I needed the surrounding

county pieces to help hold in place and strengthen my county,” she said. “In my years as a Commissioner, I’ve realized the effectiveness of our individual counties can be likened to that puzzle — to find success, we must come together and make it a priority to stay connected. Certainly, our unity is what makes us strongest.” ■

2020-2021 MINORITY ISSUES STEERING COMMITTEE

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Hon. Tyrone Moye | Clarke

Hon. Ricky Burney | Clay

Hon. Jimmy Jones | Coffee

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Pro Tip: How to Welcome Newly Elected Commissioners

The presidential election is not the only important contest on ballots this year. County commission seats are on ballots in 54 of Alabama's 67 counties, affecting more than half of all commission members statewide.

From the perspective of county employees, a significant number of department heads will be answering to new bosses come November. Fortunately, ACCA's affiliate groups continue to be a valuable resource for helping their members extend a proper welcome to newly elected commissioners.

For newly elected commissioners in Alabama, the learning curve can be

steep because of county government's wide reach and unique combination of responsibility and authority. To ease the transition, many veteran staff leaders have developed some sort of formal orientation process.

One of the most popular ways to approach the task is by providing commissioners with a "go-to notebook" (or custom reference manual), along with a face-to-face briefing and tour. Some department heads have transitioned from a three-ring binder to an electronic reference, such as a PowerPoint presentation. A digital file that can be saved to a tablet or other mobile devices also

offers benefits.

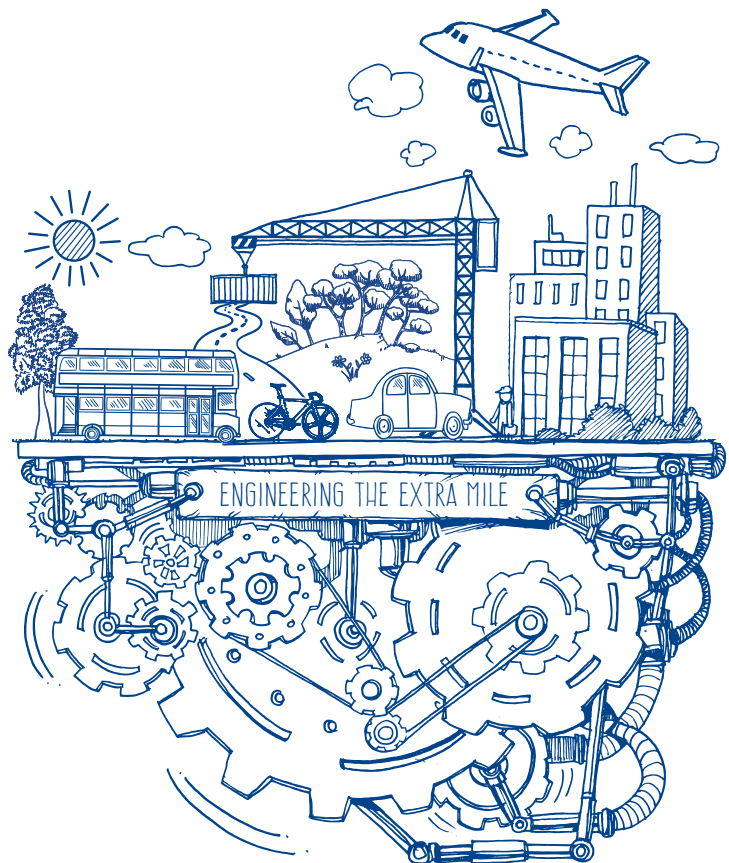
In Jackson County, Administrator Bob Manning had already provided the budget to incoming commissioners in early October. "I let them know that I can spend some time with them reviewing or answering any budget questions they may have," he said. "Both new commissioners have already been in my office for some discussions on different aspects of our budget."

Additionally, Administrator Gwendolyn Richardson in Monroe County said it is important to emphasize the new commissioner

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orientation and all training available for commission members.

EMA Director Phyllis Little in Cullman County has a guide for elected officials (county and municipal) that she updates annually, and a February 2020 version is available on the ACCA website. Similarly, Coffee County 9-1-1 and EMA provide a joint briefing for new commissioners and newly elected city officials, said 9-1-1 Coordinator Marvin McIlwain.

Henry County Engineer Chris Champion said commissioners have typically been very receptive to the in-person orientation and thick three-ring binder he provides. Over the years, commissioners have said they were glad to have the notebook as reference when responding to questions from citizens. Champion shared his notebook's Table of Contents, which is also available on the ACCA website. ■

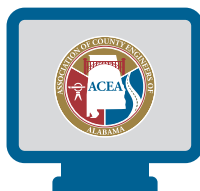
On the Web: Resources for Administrators, Engineers and EMA



For Administrators

"Developing a Go-To Notebook for New Commissioners"

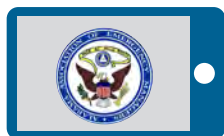
Source: ACCA General Counsel Morgan Arrington



For Engineers

Table of Contents, Road Department Orientation Notebook

Source: Henry County Engineer Chris Champion



For Emergency Managers

Cullman County Elected Officials Guide to Emergency Management

Source: Cullman County EMA Director Phyllis Little

AlabamaCounties.org/gotonotebook

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New Strategic Plan Needs Input from Every ACCA Member

For the past two decades, the Association's activities have been driven by a written strategic vision developed and approved by the membership.

This fall, the ACCA Board of Directors kicked off development of a new strategic plan, "The Road to Achievement," that will guide the organization's focus for the next five years. The planning process will be led by a committee of 25 elected officials and county employees.

"But every member of county

government will be asked to provide their unique perspective on where this organization should go and how we should get there," said ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield. "We look forward to the process, to your engagement and to our journey together."

The ACCA Board has already reviewed the current strategic plan, known as the "Team 2021 Report," and President Randy Vest has appointed committee members representing the Association's

12 geographic districts, two self-insurance funds and five affiliate groups, along with a few at-large members. Committee members are reviewing the "Team 2021 Report" and analyzing progress made on those goals.

A critical component in plan development will take shape later this year with a survey of the ACCA membership, both elected officials and county employees. The timeline calls for the full membership to vote on the plan in December 2021. ■

Highlights of Accomplishments from the Team 2021 Strategic Plan

Unify the County Voice by ...

✓ *Placing an Enhanced Emphasis on Public Awareness of County Government Responsibilities and Activities*

- Utilize statewide media proactively
- Provide assistance to start public dialogue around important issues
- Assist counties with improving their social media presence

✓ *Further Empowering the Advocacy Efforts of the Association's Membership*

- Motivate all 67 counties to take an active role in the Association's efforts to pass long-term, sustainable transportation funding legislation
- Create a communication methodology that will encourage more active engagement from members

✓ *Mobilizing and Energizing the Association's Affiliate Organizations*

- Increase exposure for affiliate organizations' contributions to the advancement of county government

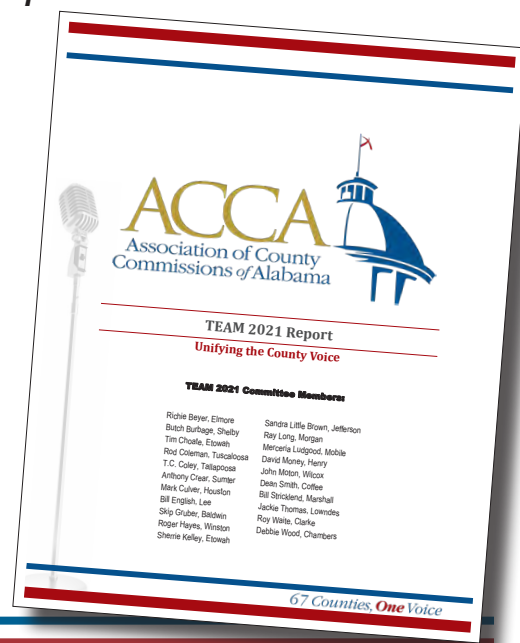
✓ *Nurturing and Growing the Association's Insurance Programs*

- Promote the new county-owned property insurance program
- Enhance customer service to members

✓ *Strengthening the Membership's Commitment to Securing the Future Influence of the Association*

- Emphasize the TEAM mentality by focusing on common interests

Access the full TEAM 2021 Report at AlabamaCounties.org/publications.



STRATEGIC PLAN 2027: THE ROAD TO ACHIEVEMENT

Committee Members

*Commissioner Keith Davis | Walker
District 1*

*Chairman Dale Strong | Madison
District 2*

*Chairman & Probate Judge Tim Burgess | Cherokee
District 3*

*Commissioner Tommy Bowers | St. Clair
District 4*

*President Jimmie Stephens | Jefferson
District 5*

*Chairman Allen Turner | Greene
District 6*

*Commissioner Laura Cobb | Cleburne
District 7*

*Commissioner Charlie Williams | Chambers
District 8*

*Commissioner Isaiah Sankey | Montgomery
District 9*

*Chairman Billie Jo Underwood | Baldwin
District 10*

*Chairman Greg White | Covington
District 11*

*Commissioner Merceria Ludgood | Mobile
District 12*

*Commissioner Doug Sinquefield | Houston
Chair, ACCA Workers' Compensation
Self-Insurers Fund*

*Chairman & Probate Judge Arthur Crawford | Hale
Chair, ACCA Liability Self-Insurance Fund Inc.*

*Rod Morgan | Coffee
Association of County Administrators of Alabama*

*DeAndre Kimbrough | Perry
Association of County Engineers of Alabama*

*Ernie Baggett | Autauga
Alabama Association of Emergency Managers*

*Gordon Sandlin | Cullman
Alabama Association of 9-1-1 Districts*

*Terri Henderson | Montgomery
County Revenue Officers Association of Alabama*

*Commissioner Rhondel Rhone | Clarke
At-Large*

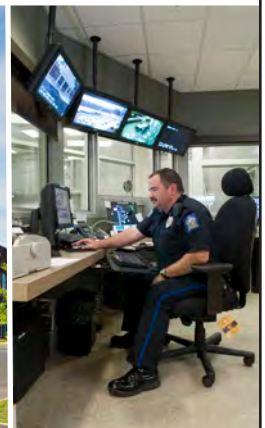
*Richie Beyer | Elmore
At-Large*

*Chairman & Probate Judge Bill English | Lee
At-Large*

*Chairman Collin Daly | Limestone
At-Large*

*Chad Scroggins | Shelby
At-Large*

*Commissioner Jerry Tingle | Tuscaloosa
At-Large*



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Prepping for the Alabama Legislature

So many familiar routines have been retooled because of COVID-19, and county legislative preparations are no exception — but ACCA is working to ensure the ONE Voice of county government continues to make an impact on Goat Hill.

The 2021 Regular Session of the Alabama Legislature begins on February 2, and ACCA preparations have been ongoing since the summer, when counties selected their representative on the Association's 67-member Legislative Committee.

Instead of meeting en masse for two days, ACCA's 67-member Legislative Committee divided into subcommittees for virtual meetings in mid-October, and these sessions were followed by a virtual meeting of the full committee this month to consider a revised 2021 County Platform.

Three familiar items on the Association calendar are being handled very differently for the 2021 session to accomplish the work of county government's ONE Voice while also keeping everyone safe.

For starters, the traditional Annual Legislative Conference is being succeeded by a scaled-down gathering, the **Legislative Committee Huddle**, and new **"Listen Up" Coaching Sessions**. The huddle will bring Legislative Committee members together face-to-face for educational presentations

THE COUNTY PROCESS: WINNING THE 2020-2021 LEGISLATIVE SEASON

STRATEGIZE

SEPTEMBER - NOVEMBER

Team Strategy Meetings:

- Affiliate Legislative Committees (Virtual)
- Minority Issues Steering Committee (Virtual)
- ACCA Legislative Committee & Subcommittees (Virtual)

STUDY

DECEMBER

Team Playbook Review:

- ACCA Membership "Listen Up" Coaching Sessions: Learning the Xs and Os of County Issues (Virtual)
- ACCA Legislative Committee Huddle (In-Person)

***The 2021 Regular Session of the Alabama Legislature will begin February 2 and end no later than May 17.**

PRACTICE JANUARY

Team Practice Sessions:

- ACCA District “Prep Rallies” (Virtual)
- County “Prep Talks” with Legislators (In-Person & Virtual)

WORK FEBRUARY – MAY

Team “Go Time:”

- County Game Weeks (Virtual)

RECAP JULY - AUGUST

Team Celebration & Reflection:

- Legislator MVP Ceremonies (In-Person)
- Season Highlights & County Legislative All-Star Recognition (In-Person)



and a final vote on the 2021 County Platform. As you may recall, the entire County Family typically convenes for the Legislative Conference, and this year, every commission and affiliate member is invited to engage in the “Listen Up” Coaching Sessions: Learning the Xs and Os of County Issues. For these sessions, members will receive access to a series of brief audio recordings about county legislation and issues.

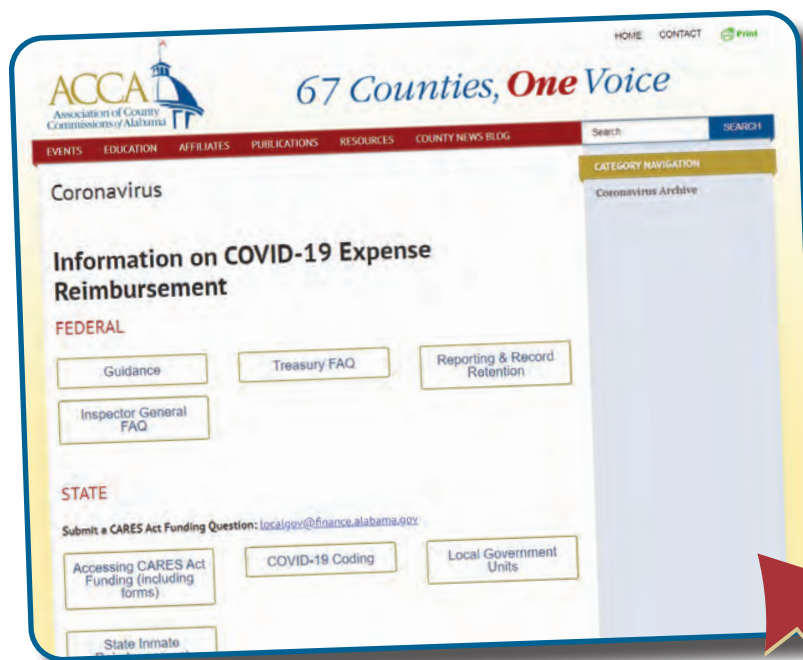
During January, ACCA is conducting virtual **District “Prep Rallies”** in lieu of the usual in-person district meetings. The Prep Rallies will allow all members of the County Team to reconnect, review December activities and discuss the latest information impacting the 2021 Legislative Session. Additionally, counties will be encouraged to open the lines of communication with their local delegation through **“Prep Talks” with Legislators**. Whether handled in-person or virtually, these will create opportunities to discuss county priorities with lawmakers well before the session kicks off.

“Go Time” for the County Team will begin in February and could extend as late as mid-May. Due to the constraints brought on by COVID-19, the usual County Days at the Legislature will be replaced by **County Game Weeks**. Each county will be assigned a particular week to use various virtual platforms to connect with their legislators and publicly advocate for county government. The most active counties will be awarded and recognized at the ACCA 93rd Convention.

The 2020 Regular Session of the Alabama Legislature was substantially disrupted by the public health emergency, leaving some of ACCA’s priorities unfinished. These include legislation addressing the ethics law’s revolving door provision, Retirement Systems of Alabama governance, election expense reimbursement, board of equalization nominations, Rebuild Alabama advertising requirements, “dips” and “dunks” requirements, inmate housing and “safer place” establishment.

Among the additional issues on the horizon for 2021 are COVID-19 liability, open records, Simplified Sellers Use Tax amendments, tax sales, organizational sales tax exemptions, police jurisdictions, post-disaster debris, inmate reforms, historical monuments and lifetime pistol permits. ■

CARES Act Resources: AlabamaCounties.org/coronavirus



Guidance continues to change regarding COVID-19 expense reimbursement through the federal CARES Act.

- Access up-to-date information and documents for counties at AlabamaCounties.org/coronavirus.
- Submit a CARES Act funding question to localgov@finance.alabama.gov.

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PLAN 2020: Passion for Public Service

The members of PLAN 2020 are nearing the end of their journey together and will be recognized later this year for their hard work and commitment under the program. The Association promised that the program would help these second-term commissioners have a greater impact in their home counties. Here's a quick look at the Passion Projects they have undertaken:



Hon. David Money

*Chairman &
Probate Judge,
Henry County*

▲ **Passion Project** Henry County E-911 Dispatch Centralization

▲ **Project Goal**
Consolidating three E-911 dispatch locations into one

▲ **Project Benefit to Community**
Streamlining E-911 dispatch will provide substantial savings of taxpayer dollars through reductions of duplicate personnel and equipment while also making possible increased compensation for remaining dispatchers.



Hon. Joseph Parnell

*Chairman,
Chilton County*

▲ **Passion Project** Alabama Farm Center at ALFA Centennial Park

▲ **Project Goal**
Advancing construction of the Alabama Farm Center at ALFA Centennial Park, a 520-acre economic development project

▲ **Project Benefit to Community**
Adding this facility and related developments are projected to draw upwards of 750,000 visitors a year, generating a \$30-million sales tax impact.



Hon. Arthur L. Crawford Sr.

*Chairman &
Probate Judge,
Hale County*

▲ **Passion Project** Community Storm Shelter Expansion

▲ **Project Goal**
Establishing safe, protective shelters for use during severe weather

▲ **Project Benefit to Community**
Making shelters available to citizens has been a community priority since the 2011 tornadoes took lives and caused catastrophic damage across Alabama.

Step by step — Recent milestones have included reorganizing the local industrial development board into an industrial development authority, hiring a full-time economic developer and engaging every municipality in the county.



Hon. Bertha Kelly-McElrath

*Vice-Chair,
Coosa County*

▲ **Passion Project** Improving Health Opportunities for Physical Engagement (I.H.O.P.E.)

▲ **Project Goal**
Establishing a community facility for educational services to aid in combatting obesity, diabetes, heart disease and other health problems facing county residents

▲ **Project Benefit to Community**
Providing this new facility will help to educate citizens about practical steps they can take to reduce health risks and strengthen relationships within the community.

Community Partners —

This fire hydrant project has benefitted from private donations, commitments from four fire departments, in-kind contributions from a local water authority, along with county support. The target is to complete installation by spring 2021.



Mr. David Kelley

*Former Commissioner,
Marshall County*

▲ **Passion Project** Fire Safety Initiative

▲ **Project Goal**
Installing fire hydrants at 9 local churches

▲ **Project Benefit to Community**
Enhancing fire protection at these small churches can help to reduce insurance costs for the struggling congregations.

**Hon. Lee Patterson***Commissioner,
Calhoun County*

▲ **Passion Project** Chief Ladiga Landing Enhancements

▲ **Project Goal**

Improving park attractions and amenities with plantings of native species, construction of two pavilions and the addition of a historic truss bridge

▲ **Project Benefit to Community**

Planting native species will make this park a destination for school field trips, and re-erecting the county's last truss bridge is an act of historic preservation.

**Hon. Jason Black***Commissioner,
Limestone County*

▲ **Passion Project** Recreational Public Access

▲ **Project Goal**

Redesigning a public boat launch and public fishing area

▲ **Project Benefit to Community**

Increasing recreational opportunities for families will enhance quality of life and help the community enjoy the area's natural resources.

**Hon. Mike Vest***Commissioner,
Shelby County*

▲ **Passion Project** End Heroin Birmingham Walk

▲ **Project Goal**

Bringing awareness and resources to those who are in need and raising funds to provide scholarships for those who can't afford recovery

▲ **Project Benefit to Community**

Increasing awareness of opioid addiction benefits individuals struggling with substance abuse and their friends and family. Helping people access treatment saves and transforms lives.

Rails to Trails —

Calhoun County claims 27 of the Chief Ladiga Trail's 33 miles, and the landing provides direct access from the western portion of the county.

**Hon. Pat Ezell***Commissioner,
Sumter County*

▲ **Passion Project** 2020 Census Complete Count

▲ **Project Goal**

Promoting Census participation

▲ **Project Benefit to Community**

Conducting special events and boosting communication should promote Census participation, which will benefit an economically disadvantaged county and help increase grant dollars and business investment.

**Hon. Joe Hackworth***Commissioner,
Lauderdale County*

▲ **Passion Project** Response Agency Resource Guide

▲ **Project Goal**

Providing emergency responders with an online database of local resources

▲ **Project Benefit to Community**

Connecting emergency responders and helping them share resources will improve public safety for the citizens of Lauderdale County.

Team Effort — Through this project, there are 14 volunteer fire departments, a municipal fire department, the sheriff's department and county EMA all working collaboratively.

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Hon. Michael Armistead

*Chairman &
Probate Judge,
Choctaw County*

▲ **Passion Project** Civil Rights Trail Establishment

▲ **Project Goal**

Memorializing the people who fought for racial equality in Choctaw County and recognizing their achievements

▲ **Project Benefit to Community**

Honoring local Civil Rights heroes in tangible ways is an important step to close a long-standing gap in the area's historical commemorations.

PLAN 2022 Wants You!

If you are poised to begin your second commission term in November, you are eligible for the next class of ACCA's leadership program, Passion Leadership Accountability Networking (PLAN). Good luck on the campaign trail! Recruiting for PLAN 2022 will be underway in the coming months. Watch your email inbox for details!

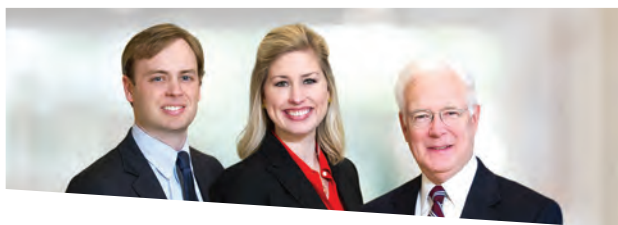
Passion
Leadership
Accountability
Networking

A program for second-term commission members

Historical Markers —

Substantial progress has been made in this ongoing project, and the following official dedications have occurred:

- Choctaw County Civil Rights Memorial Highway recognizing all who led the charge during the Civil Rights Movement;
- Margaret Ann Knott Memorial Bridge in memory of a protester who died after being struck by a car in Butler;
- Brown-Crowell Bridge recognizing two African-American elected officials — Dandy Brown and the late Odis Crowell, both former county commissioners.



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Honoring Calhoun County's COVID-19 MVPs

The novel coronavirus came early to Calhoun County, with news in late February that the county would receive patients from a cruise ship for quarantining purposes.

The Calhoun County Commission nominated **EMA Director Michael Barton** and the **entire EMA staff** for recognition as County COVID-19 MVPs because they have repeatedly gone above and beyond the call of

duty during pandemic response.

In Calhoun County, there are three major county-wide initiatives to lead the community through preparedness, response and short term-recovery: the Infectious Disease Task Force, the Unified Command System and the Safe Reopening and Short-Term Recovery Advisory Council. In each case, EMA has executed the county commission's directives with efficiency and effectiveness, pulling together

numerous partner entities and placing an extra emphasis on internal and external communication.

"We are pleased with the work Michael and the EMA staff have done and continue to do during this difficult time," wrote County Administrator Mark Tyner.

In honor of these extraordinary contributions, Calhoun County EMA joins the ranks of our various County COVID-19 MVPs, alongside Administrator Sonya Kirkwood and Accounts Payable Clerk Kelly Jones of Washington County. ■



In your county, who stands out as a most valuable player since virus response began in Alabama? Please send their name and a few details about their extraordinary contribution to afitzpatrick@alabamacounties.org by Dec. 1.



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STATUS REPORT: REBUILD ALABAMA

Counties reach successful milestone in Rebuild Alabama Act implementation

The stroke of midnight on September 30 may have passed unnoticed, but it marked a big milestone for county roads and bridges in Alabama. September's end signified the conclusion of the first year of implementation for the Rebuild Alabama Act, a historic investment in the state's infrastructure.

"All 67 counties promised to be accountable with this revenue, and we are keeping our word," said ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield. "Rebuild Alabama will benefit our state for generations to come, and this is just the beginning."

Annual Grant Program

On Sept. 9, Gov. Kay Ivey and the Alabama Department of Transportation finished out the inaugural year of the Rebuild Alabama Annual Grant Program on a positive note, awarding a total of \$1.5 million to six local governments for road and bridge projects.

The program sets aside at least \$10 million of the state's share of new gas tax revenue for local roads and bridges. In the first year, Ivey awarded a combined \$10.2 million to 43 county and/or municipal projects. It is anticipated that all projects will be under contract by December 31.

Meanwhile, ALDOT released application materials for fiscal year 2021 in October.

ATRIP-II Grant Program

Applications were due Oct. 30 for ATRIP-II, another local government grant program within Rebuild Alabama. In early September, the Association of County Engineers of Alabama provided an ATRIP-II training webinar to advise counties on identifying eligible projects, submitting applications properly and implementing projects in coordination with ALDOT. ACEA members can access the recorded webinar at



Photo: Governor's Office

AlabamaCountyEngineers.org/member-resources.

Accountability Measures

County commissions have adopted individual plans for utilizing Rebuild Alabama funding in year two, and these County Transportation Plans are available to members of the public at AlabamaCounties.org/rebuildal. Additionally, the ACCA is in the process of compiling the statewide summary of construction contracts for legislative leaders.

Cost Containment

Working together, counties have taken steps to maximize the buying

power of Rebuild Alabama funds. ACCA's longstanding cooperative purchasing program has been expanded to offer more roadbuilding materials, such as limestone and granite aggregate, traffic marking materials and cement pipe. The program is highly efficient because a single competitive bid process covers all 67 counties for an entire year.

Rate Adjustment

The 2019 Rebuild Alabama Act established a phased process for adjusting the levy on gas and diesel fuels, which had not changed since 1992. The second phase began Oct. 1, with an additional charge of 2 cents per gallon. ■

INSURANCE UPDATE

Above and Beyond the SIDP

The ACCA Liability Self-Insurance Fund Inc. annually recognizes nine member counties that have not only made outstanding efforts to improve safety but also demonstrated measurable results.

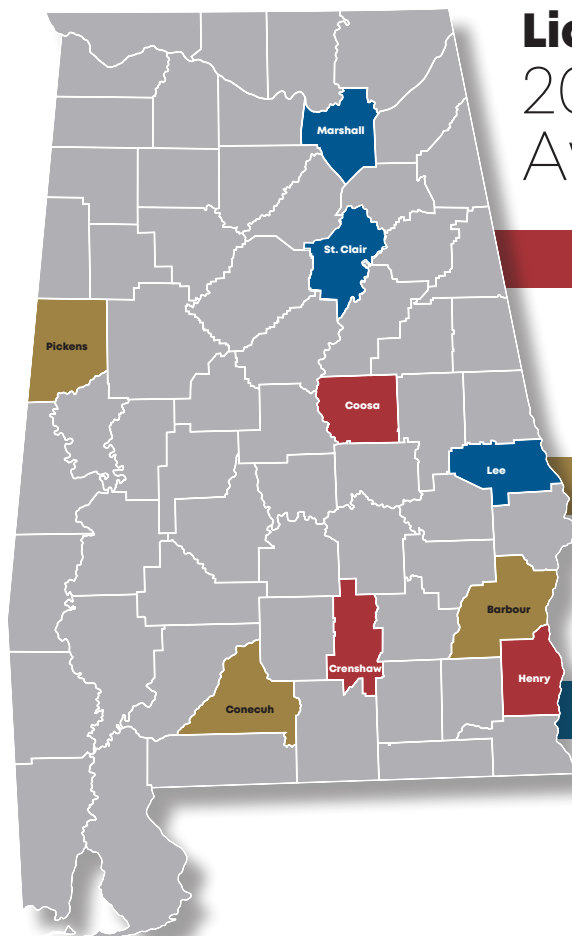
The awards are sponsored by the Fund and presented by County Risk Services Inc., the exclusive third-party administrator for the ACCA Self-Insurance Funds.

First-place winners received a crystal award and \$1,500. Second- and third-place winners received \$1,000.

The rigorous criteria require:

- Low average loss ratio for the past three years, as compared to counties of similar size;
- Participation in the Fund's Safety Incentive Discount Program (SIDP);
- Utilization of the ACCA eRisk Hub[®] cyber security website;
- Submission of an awards application describing steps taken to improve safety and reduce losses during the previous 12 months.

Common threads among the first-place counties were their implementation of COVID-19 countermeasures and collaboration with other county elected officials. Major safety measures implemented by the first-place counties included adding GPS on all road department vehicles and equipment so speed can be monitored, installing backup cameras on motorgraders, installing a camera system and panic alarms throughout the courthouse, and upgrading the jail's electronic doors and intercom system. ■



Liability Fund's 2020 Safety Awards

Category I

- 1st — Crenshaw
2nd — Henry
3rd — Coosa

Category II

- 1st — Barbour
2nd — Pickens
3rd — Conecuh

Category III

- 1st — Marshall
2nd — St. Clair
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FAMILY ALBUM



Photos from Alabama Counties

ACCA 92nd Convention succeeds with participation from all 67 counties

This year's ACCA 92nd Convention saw incredible participation and engagement from all 67 counties. County Family members demonstrated their commitment to learning from one another and staying connected during this unusual and difficult time. Counties can clearly handle any "curve" that comes our way — just take a look at a few images from the in-person ONE Voice Session and county watch parties around the state.



ACCA ONE Voice Session



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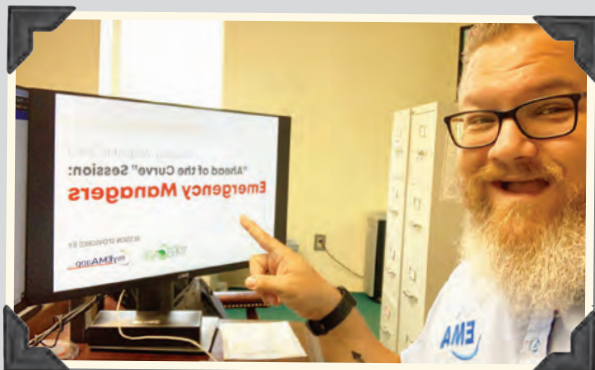
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County Commission magazine wants to publish a selection of member photos in every issue to showcase the many ways county government touches the lives of Alabamians and to recognize the dedicated men and women who make counties work. Please send photos (large file sizes preferred) to Abby Fitzpatrick, Director of Communication & Engagement, at afitzpatrick@alabamacounties.org.



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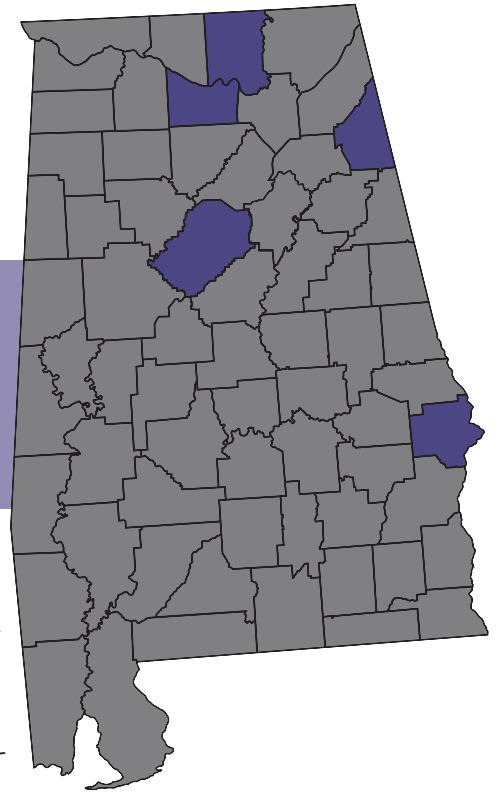
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Voices from the County Family



Q

At the ACCA 92nd Convention, Dr. Kevin Elko's message to the County Family boiled down to "So what? Now what?" This year has brought extreme and dramatic change to our daily work. How should people in your field apply "So what? Now what?" going forward?



LeAnn Horne

*Russell County
President,
Association of County
Administrators of
Alabama*



@HappyTailsToYou

A

The 2021 Legislative Session is just around the corner and will be a major challenge — more so than ever considering our current environment. We must become laser-focused on the county issues and the preparations and logistics impacting the session so that we can effectively advocate amid COVID-19. As always, it will take all of us speaking with ONE Voice to make this session successful for county government.



Greg Bodley

*Morgan County
President, Association
of County Engineers
of Alabama*



@gregbodley

A

Now what? Those two simple words are incredibly powerful. Many of us are cleaning up from a devastating hurricane, and all of us are rolling into a busy year two of Rebuild Alabama. We've got to remember that Governor Ivey, the entire Legislature and the people of Alabama have entrusted this work to us — and what an honor that really is. There's no doubt that every county engineer has a vision for how they want their roads and bridges to look in the coming years — but how do you we turn a vision into reality amid so much uncertainty? Dr. Elko spoke of taking your vision and focusing in on what you want to accomplish in the next 90 days. Amid COVID-19, we've got to take the 90-day approach and keep pushing for success.



Jim Coker

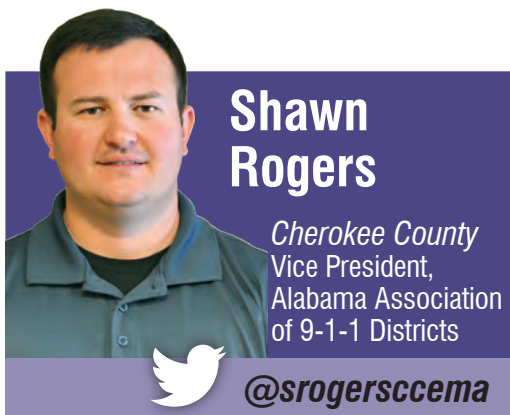
*Jefferson County
President, Alabama
Association
of Emergency
Managers*



@EMAJeffCoAL

A

Across Alabama, our county emergency management agencies are all facing the challenges brought to us by COVID, significant weather events and local economic impacts. Moving forward in the coming year, we must continue to take a "now what?" approach to our issues and utilize our new skills, virtual operations, and "lessons learned" in order to best serve our citizens. The year 2020 has allowed us to grow the partnerships with our county commissions, as well as other government and non-government associations, and we must continue to nurture those as we collectively seek solutions for common issues.



A One immediate imperative for AAND — just like for ACCA and our fellow affiliate groups — is adapting our legislative advocacy to this new environment. The AAND leadership is in the process of fine-tuning its legislative communication among the 9-1-1 community, but in the months leading up to the session, we must collectively do everything we can to build and strengthen relationships with legislators. Having these relationships will be essential if we are to influence the legislative process during a session with limitations on legislator access.



A We all strive to be fair and even-handed in the collection and enforcement of our taxes and licenses. The need for efficient and effective county revenue collection processes are of critical importance now more than ever. While collections may have temporarily decreased, we still have businesses that continue to operate and other businesses that have just opened and are beginning to pay taxes and license fees. So, for CROAA members, “*So what? Now what?*” involves understanding the trying business climate and adapting to best serve not only the county but also the business community.

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