

# COUNTY COMMISSION

A portrait of an older man with white hair, a mustache, and glasses, wearing a light-colored suit jacket, white shirt, and dark tie. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a solid dark brown color.

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**What's Inside...**

**Meet the Association's  
new president**



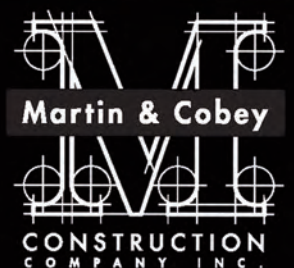


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VOLUME 55, NUMBER 4



*Etowah County Commissioner Tim Choate was elected 2011-2012 president of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama during the 83rd Annual Convention in August.*

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Hon. Tim Choate  
President

## We must speak with one voice for county government

*Our collective strength is our  
greatest asset*

*The following is reprinted from President Choate's acceptance speech, given at the Association's 83rd Annual Convention in August.*

Good evening. It is a great honor for me to rise tonight as the President of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama. It is a responsibility that I pledge to take extremely seriously and a responsibility that I realize can be fulfilled only if each of you are part of a unified effort during the next 12 months.

Last year at this time I sat right over there and listened to the remarks and ideas of our President Ricky Burney. This afternoon at lunch we spent a little time thanking him for his service during this year. When you assume the position of first vice president the reality of what you've signed up for hits you right between the eyes. You realize that it won't be long until you will be sitting in the hot seat. In the last 12 months, I watched Ricky rise to the occasion of leading this organization at, perhaps, the most critical time in many, many years.

Ricky, I want to personally thank you for the outstanding job you have done this year. You have led us with vision and purpose. We truly have a new partnership with the state's leaders – just as you promised last year. Tonight, I pledge to you that, with the help of those in this room and throughout the state, we'll continue what you've started this year.

This last night of our convention is a unique setting for all of us. It truly represents the conclusion of one year, the close of a week of learning and preparing for the challenges ahead, and – at the same time – tonight

represents the start of a new year with new goals and new promise. Just as this closing night represents a unique collection of emotions, the role of president of this organization is one of conflicting principles and realities.

When you stand behind this podium you are expected to set a course that can be completed in one year, for in just 12 months Ricky Harcrow will be president and I will be sitting in the "has-been's" chair. At the same time, we are also to initiate a process that can survive and that pays dividends for years into the future. That's a daunting challenge – to start something you can finish in a year and that will continue to serve us for years to come.

That's certainly what Ricky has done and what I know our new first vice president Ricky Harcrow will do next year. It is also what Larry "White Shoes" White did the year before and Joe Faulk did the year prior to "Shoes." It was the challenge accepted by everyone else who has accepted the role of president in this organization.

Together, this year we will work toward a goal that will leave a lasting and positive mark on county government and that will serve to improve our ability to respond to the people of our districts and our counties. Our plans this year are to continue the momentum and the vision that has been set before me, while also establishing a new identity and philosophy for our important Association.

I realize this challenge will be demanding on my time, both personally and as a county commissioner in Etowah County. And this responsibility will not be



fulfilled without the commitment of my family, colleagues, friends and staff. Before I spend a few minutes on specifics, I want to introduce the people who are here with me tonight. They are here to support me and their presence should serve as a pledge to you that they will do their part during the next year.

If you looked closely at a set of plaques that hang at the Association headquarters building, you might have realized that my election represents, perhaps, one of the most unique sets of circumstances in our organization's history. In the Association's conference room three framed documents list every person who has served as president – dating all the way back more than 80 years when Harry Culverhouse of Jefferson County was elected president in 1929.

The names paint a wonderful picture of unity and collective dedication. The presidents are from Jefferson, Mobile, Montgomery and Madison; as well as from Wilcox, Clarke, Conecuh and Hale. Rural and urban. Growing and suffering. Black Belt and Wiregrass. The list represents an organization with roots in the concept of unity and oneness of purpose.

I am from Etowah County, a “district” commissioner elected by the people in District 6 back home. This district includes much of Gadsden and my own little community of Whorton's Bend. It is a wonderfully beautiful part of our state and the people there benefit from this Association, even though most of them don't know what the ACCA does or stands for.

Each person who has served as president has been equally proud of their own little part of the state. But there is a name on that list of “former” presidents that caught my eye the other day.

Ten years ago tonight, a “district” commissioner from Etowah County

stood behind this podium as the Association's new president. He was a large man who commanded attention with his size, with his love for this Association and for his dedication to seeing the Association prosper in its representation of county government. Interesting, that new president 10 years ago – Billy Ray “Bulldog” Williams – was also from District 6 in Etowah County.

We were colleagues and friends. I remember sitting with him and discussing his decision to run for the county commission for the first time. My family and I supported his campaign and, if he'd been able, I know he would have supported me both as a county commissioner and as president of this Association.

So, tonight, 10 years later, another commissioner from the same little section of Etowah County stands before you after being elected president of this Association. This has never happened before – that two commissioners from the same “district” have been elected president of this Association. Even though “Bulldog” was called home just a few months after completing his year as president, his work and the fruits of his year still linger tonight as I stand before you; and as I rise to pick up the baton he laid down for me 10 years ago.

As we are set to being our journey together, I ask that you – if I can borrow your term Ricky – be a “partner” with me, with “Bulldog” and with the Board of Directors as we work to make footprints that will remain years after we all complete our tenures as part of county government.

During his night, “Bulldog” put his finger squarely on the challenge that faces us now and into the future. He spoke about being elected president not because he was the smartest or because he had the best ideas. He said that he became president because,

“I came when I was asked; I offered my services; and I did whatever I could to help this Association reach its goals.”

And each of us could say the same thing. Our roles in this Association are not set because of our specific skills or backgrounds –but because we are willing to participate and we understand the true mission of this organization. And that is to represent county government with one, unified voice.

As he reached the conclusion of his remarks, Billy Ray laid down a challenge that still rings true tonight...

“Remember, there is no one else to speak for county government except this Association. And the ACCA cannot speak without you.”

“For without this Association, all of us would face difficulties too strong to overcome.”

*Continued on page 23*

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Sonny Brasfield  
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Sonny Brasfield". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sonny" being more prominent.

## Tackling constitutional reform, again

*Local law process is the real issue that needs our attention*

A new commission charged with offering suggestions on reforming Alabama's outdated constitution has begun its work. This isn't exactly earth-shaking news in Alabama; we've had about a dozen or so efforts at this kind of reform in the last quarter century.

You see, Alabama's constitution is more than 100 years old and folks have been talking about updating it as much as 90 years ago. When this Association was created in 1929 one of the cornerstones was a desire for county officials to lead a movement toward a new constitution.

Now, I'm not one of those who believes the document needs change simply because it is old. Nor do I think reform is in order because the voters of this state have amended the constitution more than 700 times. The problem of excessive amendments could be addressed simply by making it more difficult to pass constitutional amendments and the actual "age" of the constitution is not – alone – a reason for change.

The issues related to age and size are certainly easy to discuss, but those conversations gloss over the real problem. One might even argue that the previous efforts have been unproductive because they have not focused on the real problem – the real reason why the constitution should be changed.

Every group has its own analysis of what is wrong. Some point to the inclusion of actual income tax rates in the constitution, which makes it impossible to react in times of fiscal crisis. Others highlight the language that places the administrative

structure of our ad valorem taxation process in the constitution as a huge roadblock to any real tax reform in Alabama. And, still others will flag the issue of earmarking tax revenue (which is also in the constitution, by the way) as a structural issue crying out for improvement.

But at the local level, where the citizens live and work every day, the most glaring of problems has seldom gotten any real attention from previous reform commissions. The constitution contains a process for passing local laws that makes it difficult – some would say nearly impossible – for county government to provide services in an effective and efficient way. And this must be changed.

No, this isn't going to be one of columns in which we promote the need for so-called "Home Rule" in Alabama. Because the real pressure point to enhance the operation of county government isn't simply the granting of additional decision-making at the local level. For if this commission shifts additional government responsibility to the county level without also changing the way the Legislature interacts with counties, then all of its work could still be reversed in its tracks.

County governments in Alabama are constantly and consistently tormented by the constitutional procedure that allows for the passage of "local" laws that apply in only one county. Though many states allow for the enactment of laws that apply less-than-statewide, Alabama's system is troublingly unique and difficult to defend in 2011.

## More and more every day, the success of our state is linked not to a big state governmental machine in Montgomery, but in the ability of our local officials to adapt and change to the immediate needs of our citizens.

Using the constitutionally established process, the legislators who are elected to represent a portion of a county are allowed – by the other members of the Legislature – to pass whatever legislation they wish as long as it applies only in “their” county. As though in the year 2011 there is something akin to the old Berlin Wall, we blindly allow one county to be hamstrung with local laws that curb the ability of local government to respond.

Alabama’s poorest county, for example, struggles with a local bill that mandates that the county commission pay its sheriff deputies the same salary as state troopers employed by the State of Alabama. In another county, a newly passed local bill requires that certain moneys deposited into the county general fund be reviewed by an unelected citizens group before being expended; and another local law actually describes in detail the size, shape and color of a decal that must be placed on the door of the vehicle driven by the county engineer.

This kind of legislation is passed using a constitutional provision allowing for the enactment of a “local” law – which passes through the legislative process without any debate – as long as it is advertised in the local newspaper and as long as it is approved by the legislators who represent that county.

We are behind the curve nationally on this issue. Most states either prohibit such laws altogether or, at

least, have a process that ensures input from neighboring or “like” counties that will inevitably be impacted by the passage of such a law.

Bringing this issue to the table is, for this Association, a bit risky. But we’ve got some experience with that kind of thing. Real reform – real change – can never come if an organization is insistent on taking the easy path.

Admittedly, there have been many occasions when local laws have been passed to the benefit of effective and efficient county government. Those issues would easily stand on their own merit and would be passed under any more-modern system.

I also realize, very well, that there are some in the Legislature who covet the power this local system generates. And, perhaps, there was a day when it could have made sense to vest that power with the Legislature.

But today the elected state representatives and senators do not travel to Montgomery by train or

horse and buggy. Citizens do not get their information from a weekly newspaper published 10 days after events have unfolded. And, more and more every day, the success of our state is linked not to a big state governmental machine in Montgomery, but in the ability of our local officials to adapt and change to the immediate needs of our citizens.

Years ago, Association President Sam Jones, now the mayor of Mobile, said Alabama would never be strong, would never reach its full potential “as long as one of its counties is weak.” This process, which vests one or two legislators with the ability to either deny public debate on matters important to local government or to decide to make decisions to change their local government without input, continues to ensure that county government is weak.

We have ANOTHER new commission to look at Alabama’s constitution. Hopefully this difficult issue will not be lost in discussions of age and 700 amendments.



**CATHERINE HUFF**

*President*

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Mary E. Pons  
Association Counsel

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary E. Pons'.

## What's right with county government

*County officials, employees  
shine every day, not just in  
times of crisis*

One of my favorite movie scenes is from “Crimes of the Heart,” the story of three Southern sisters coming together to deal with their grandfather’s illness and coping with a host of individual personal problems. Babe, played by Sissy Spacek, feeling overwhelmed with problems which include facing charges for the attempted murder of her husband, decides to end her life.

Several foiled attempts culminate with her being knocked out with her head in the stove while trying to start the gas. She is still dangling a rope around her neck attached to the chandelier which fell to the ground as she tried to hang herself. Her sister revives her and asks why she was trying to kill herself. Babe answers “I’m having a bad day.”

That scene comes to my mind frequently when I reach that state of total frustration and think I’ll just throw in the towel. It usually makes me chuckle and gets me moving again.

I think about that scene as I think about the state of county government these days. I hear from counties every day about the overwhelming struggles they face piecing together a good budget with insufficient revenues, responding to the needs of their citizens with inadequate resources, and fulfilling the mandates handed down from state and federal sources.

It is a daunting task and there just doesn’t seem to be a light at the end of the tunnel. Nonetheless, those charged with making it all

work somehow pull it together and make good things happen.

As I think of all this, I realize that things really aren’t that bad – in fact, things are good, because county government is filled with dedicated, hard-working people who fight every day to make things better using an old-fashioned determination lacking all-too-often these days. And because of that dedication, hard work, and commitment, county government in Alabama works.

The examples of good works are endless: the administrator who called me a few days after the tornadoes crying because of the loss of life in her area and asking for help to prevent unscrupulous people from using the tragedy to take advantage of those needing help in the storms’ aftermath; the engineering and emergency management personnel who worked around the clock following the storms to make sure their citizens were safe and cared for; the county officials and personnel from other parts of the state anxious to get help to affected areas; and the endless number of officials and employees who called during these difficult days to make sure that they did everything they could for their citizens and were acting in compliance with the law.

It is easy to talk about these good works that occur during a crisis, but truth is, this type of dedication occurs every day in Alabama counties. Starting early and working late, county officials and employees fight tirelessly to take care of their citizens and their



## County government is filled with dedicated, hard-working people who fight every day to make things better using an old-fashioned determination lacking all-too-often these days.

neighbors – sometimes with very few rewards and always with more problems to solve than hours in the day.

One of the most remarkable attributes of county officials and employees from where I sit is their willingness to extend their efforts beyond the county line to work for the benefit of all counties in the state.

The key to the success of this Association is participation from county officials and employees guiding the Association staff to identification of the issues of the day and helping to frame the solutions. This requires a commitment of time and energy for which there is no additional compensation.

Nonetheless, and despite the heavy workloads at home, there is never a shortage of persons willing to volunteer. Whether it requires a four-hour drive to serve on a committee addressing the future of local tax collection, chairing a committee to resolve issues related to use of county roads by the logging industry, or designing resolutions for all counties to use in complying with GASB 54, there is never a problem finding committed volunteers willing to serve above and beyond – and to serve over and over again.

Association President Tim Choate recently sent letters to about 150 county officials and employees asking them to participate in

steering committees designed to develop the Association's legislative program for 2012.

With very few exceptions, those appointed have enthusiastically agreed to serve – the only hesitation expressed being the ability to commit enough time to the project. And the participation of these volunteers ensures that once again, this Association will produce a strong legislative program that will result in improvements in county government across the state.

Many of these same individuals are also serving on committees to manage the Joint Bid Program, oversee Association-sponsored training, or provide technical assistance on tax issues. They are also serving on Association boards or representing county government on legislatively created commissions. And these same individuals will flood the halls of the State House next winter to advocate for county government when the Legislature convenes. Dedication, hard work, commitment.

I realize this is a little off topic for a column titled "In Legal Terms," but I thought it time to take a short break from all the problems counties face and mention what is right about county government – those who serve in it.

I think it important that all county officials and employees give themselves a collective pat on the

back for their efforts and for a job well done. And I extend my personal thanks – for all you do for your county, for all you do for this Association, and for all you give to me personally by having the honor to know you and call you friends and colleagues.

As former ACCA Executive Director Buddy Sharpless used to say almost daily, "This is a good place to work." Actually, it's the best job in the world. The work is very rewarding and exciting, but more importantly, it allows me an association with the best this state has to offer – the county family. Thank you all for the good works you do.

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# Tuscaloosa's McCollum wins top award

Tuscaloosa County Probate Judge and Chairman W. Hardy McCollum was presented the Association of County Commissions of Alabama's 2011 award for Outstanding Contribution to County Government in recognition of his significant contributions of time, talent and energy toward the benefit of Alabama's county governments.

"There is a difference between merely holding office for a long time and truly serving in office for a long time, and Hardy McCollum has truly served his community from the day he took office in January 1977 through today," said Sonny Brasfield, executive director of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama. "He's seen just about everything that can be seen; he's heard just about everything that can be heard; and he's always ready, willing and able to focus that experience and leadership for the betterment of this Association and all our counties."

McCollum served as ACCA president in 1995-96, though his active involvement began years earlier. He was a leader in the health insurance program when it was established in 1980, at a time when county employees simply would not have been afforded health coverage otherwise. This fund was the backstop until new programs could be put in place. He remains active on the ACCA Board of Directors and Legislative Committee.

In 1976, McCollum was first elected to probate judge and county commission chairman in Tuscaloosa County, the largest of Alabama's counties where the probate judge serves these dual roles. He is presently in his sixth term of office.

His professional activities also include membership in the National Association of Counties Transportation Steering Committee, the Probate Judges Association of Alabama and the National Association of Probate Judges.



2010-11 ACCA President Ricky Burney, left, presents the award for Outstanding Contribution to County Government to Tuscaloosa County Probate Judge and Chairman Hardy McCollum.

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# Baldwin County honored for cemetery project

The Baldwin County Commission's effort to create the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery garnered one of three statewide awards presented by the Association of County Commissions of Alabama.

The Baldwin County Commission received the 20th Annual Award for Excellence in County Government – Urban Category. The award recognizes innovative and effective programs initiated or completed between July 1, 2010, and June 30, 2011, in counties with a population of more than 50,000.

The award honors programs implemented by the county commission itself and not its agencies or boards, and does not recognize required programs the county has

merely carried out well. Instead, the award honors special efforts of county commissions to meet the needs of their communities using innovative methods.

"County commissions are doing a great deal of excellent work above and beyond normal county services that often goes unrecognized or unnoticed," said ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield. "The Association's awards program helps focus attention on the efforts that county commissions are putting forward each day to better their communities and provide unique services to their constituency."

The winning entry, titled "Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at

Spanish Fort," was chosen best among all entries during the judging process. Judges used a numerical scoring system emphasizing each program's stated objective, the involvement of the county commission in the program's implementation, the benefit of the program to the taxpayer, and the program's overall quality.

The cemetery project is a partnership of the commission and the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs. It was undertaken five years ago "to commemorate and provide a lasting tribute to the sacrifices made by south Alabama's veterans," the Baldwin County application states. It is estimated that more than 100,000 veterans live along the Gulf Coast.

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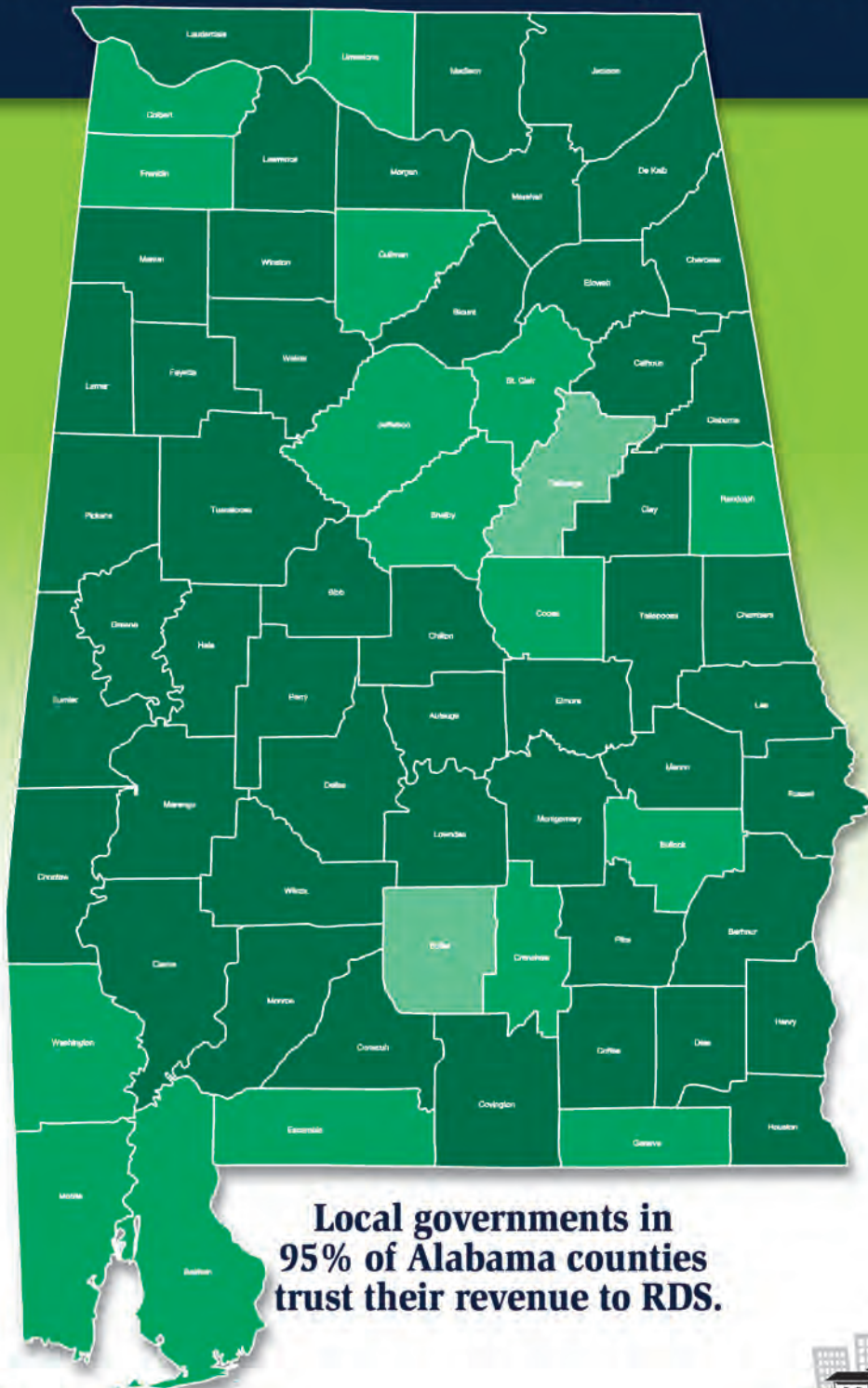
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# Excellence award recognizes Franklin County



Franklin County Engineer David Palmer, left, and Probate Judge and Chairman Barry Moore, center, accept the Excellence in County Government Award from ACCA 2010-11 President Ricky Burney.

The Franklin County Commission's effort to ensure an accurate census count garnered one of three statewide awards presented by the Association of County Commissions of Alabama.

The Franklin County Commission received the 20th Annual Award for Excellence in County Government – Rural Category. The award recognizes innovative and effective programs initiated or completed between July 1, 2010, and June 30, 2011, in counties with a population of less than 50,000.

The award honors programs implemented by the county commission itself and not its agencies or boards, and does not recognize required programs the county has merely carried out well. Instead, the award honors special efforts of county commissions to meet the needs of their communities using innovative methods.

“County commissions are doing a great deal of excellent work above and beyond normal county services that often goes unrecognized or unnoticed,” said ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield. “The Association’s awards program helps focus attention on the efforts that county commissions are putting forward each day to better their communities and provide unique services to their constituency.”

The winning entry, titled “Franklin County 2010 Census Partnership,” was chosen best among all entries during the judging process. Judges used a numerical scoring system emphasizing each program’s stated objective, the involvement of the county commission in the program’s implementation, the benefit of the program to the taxpayer, and the program’s overall quality.

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## Elected officials honored for tenure in office

The following elected officials --some commissioners, some chairmen/probate judges -- were recognized for their years of service during the ACCA's 83rd Annual Convention:

### 16 Years

A.G. Carter, Autauga County; James Eli Henderson and J.D. Hess, Calhoun County; Leland Avery, Hale County;

D.C. Thornton, Lauderdale County; John Andrew Harris, Lee County; James S. Roberts, St. Clair County; Allen Bailey Jr., Washington County; Roger Hayes, Winston County.

### 20 Years

Dock McGowan and James M. Perry, Bullock County; Stan Batemon, St. Clair County; Jimmy C. Roberson, Talladega County.

### 24 Years

James A. "Pappy" Dunn, Calhoun County; Mose Jones, Lawrence County; Paul Manning, St. Clair County.

### 28 Years

Jerold Dean, Conecuh County

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### Late commissioners remembered

In accordance with tradition, participants in the ACCA's 83rd Annual Convention observed a moment of silence in memory of commissioners who died during the preceding year. A memorial resolution is also provided to the families of Robert Bullard, Blount County, and Paul Taylor, Elmore County.

### WHAT'S ON THE MENU OF YOUR DEFERRED COMP PROGRAM?

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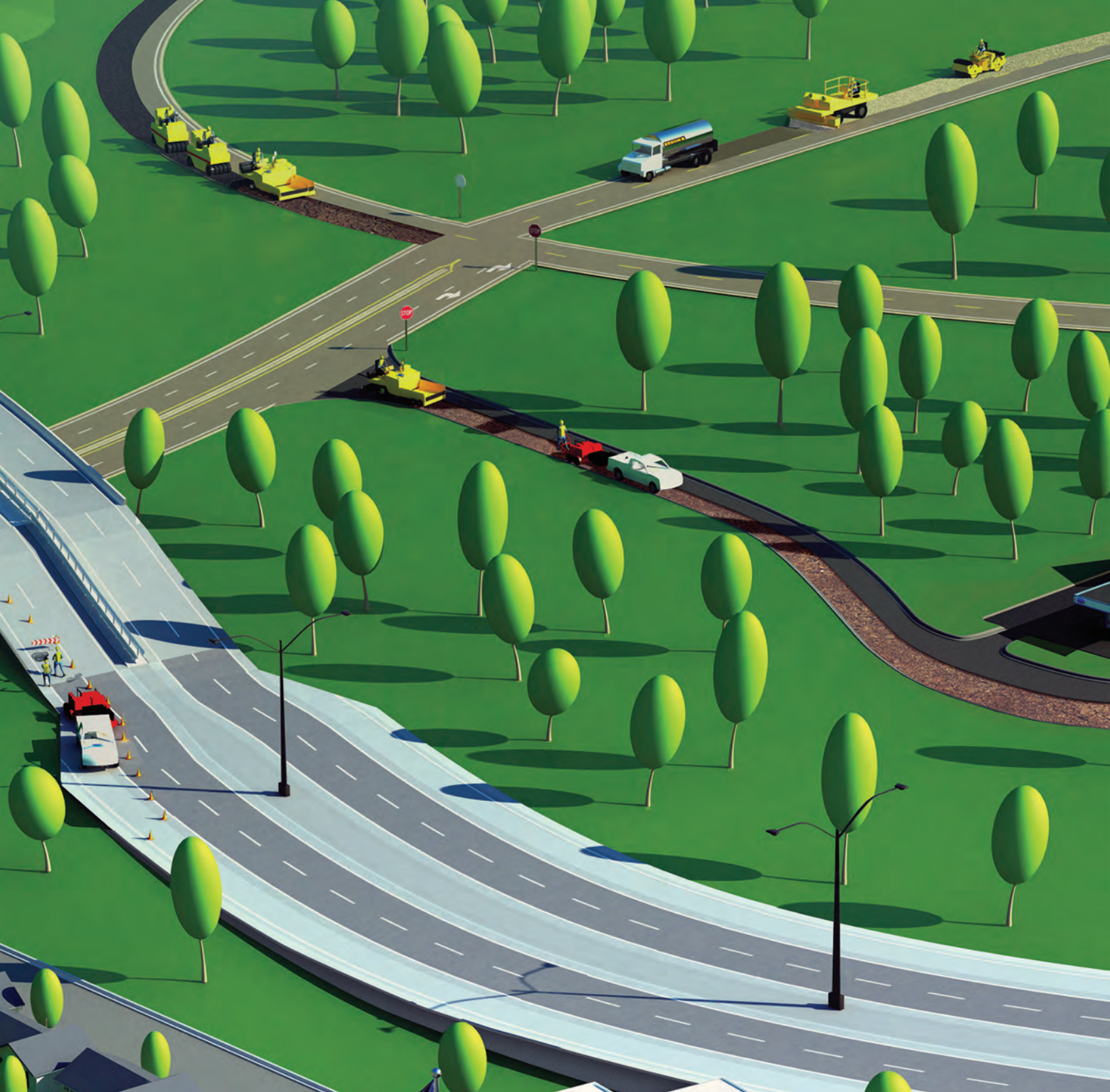
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## County Government Education Institute awards certificates

### Certificate in County Administration

Kristy Stell, Barbour County; Ralph Mitchell, Blount County; Vanessa Hendrick, Chilton County; Jessica Hare, Choctaw County; Lois Morris, Clarke County; Nina Bell, Clay

County; Kerry Castleberry, Covington County; Henry Booker and Rhonda Cooper, Elmore County; Marietta Webster and Joanne Herrin, Geneva County; Brenda Burke, Greene County; Sherry Lipscomb and Karen Scott, Henry County;

Sandra Erickson, Jackson County; Peggy King, Lawrence County; Barbara Howard and Gwinetta Ligon, Lee County; Joshua Anthony, Macon County; Meredith Hammond, Marengo County; Donna Jones, Mobile County; Monica Bryant, Perry County; Kellie Long, St. Clair County; Sonya Kirkwood, Washington County.

### Certified County Administrator

Kristy Stell, Barbour County; Vanessa Hendrick, Chilton County; Barbara Harrell, Dallas County; Marietta Webster, Geneva County; Bill Dempsey, Houston County; Meredith Hammond, Marengo County; Nancy Wilson, Marshall County; Sonya Kirkwood, Washington County.

### Certificate in County Engineering Administration

Josh Harvill, Chambers County; Ben Luther, DeKalb County; Luke McGinty, Elmore County; Chris Champion, Henry County; Patrick Harvill and Justin Hardee, Lee County.

### Certified County Revenue Officer

Scott Smith and Don Williams, Jefferson County; Jayne Pearce, Tuscaloosa County.

### Basic Level Certificate

Susan Russell, Walker County.



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## ALTIST awards CRE

The Alabama Local Tax Institute for Standards and Training awarded the certified revenue examiner designation to Albert Ban, sales and use tax coordinator for Baldwin County.



## Alabama Local Government Training Institute honorees

### ALGTI Level I Certificates

Tucker Dorsey and Robert James, Baldwin County; Allen Armstrong, Dean Calvert and Andy Neill, Blount County; Ronald W. Smith, Bullock County; Lynn H. Watson, Butler County; Tim Hodges, Calhoun County; Joe L. Blanks, Chambers County; Mark Gibson and Willie C. Horn, Choctaw County; Tyrone Moye, Clarke County; Benji Langley and Emmett Owen, Cleburne County; Paul Perrett, Coosa County; Merrill Sport, Michelle Stephens and John Chris West, Crenshaw County; Darrell Hicks, Cullman County; Charles W. Gary and Steve McKinnon, Dale County; Carolyn Parker, Etowah County; Henley Hicks, Geneva County; Elzora C. Fluker and Allen Turner Jr., Greene

County; Timothy Rhodes and David A. Rogers, Hale County; Henry "Dick" Grimsley and John Ralph Saunders, Henry County; Jackie Battles and Douglas Sinquefield, Houston County; James A. Stephens, Jefferson County; Bobby Burch and Jon-Mark Nelson, Lawrence County; Robert Ham, Lee County; Michael Thompson, Marengo County; Tamey R. Hale and James Hutcheson, Marshall County; Connie Hudson, Mobile County; Henry C. Childs, Monroe County; Hamilton "Ham" Wilson Jr., Montgomery County; Ray Long and Randy Vest, Morgan County; Edward C. Ezelle Jr. and Frederick L. Kennedy, Pickens County; Oren Fannin, Pike County; Terry Lovvorn and Doug Sheppard, Randolph County; Rick Shepherd,

Shelby County; Ken Crowe, St. Clair County; Tommie Armistead and Ottice Russelle, Sumter County; Dwaine Holt and Emma Jean Thweatt, Tallapoosa County; Carl P. Simpson, Washington County; Reginald O. Weatherly, Wilcox County; Morris David Cummings Jr. and Bobby Everett, Winston County.

### ALGTI Level II Certificates

Walter D. Sansing Sr., Bibb County; Karen Bradford and Tyrone Moye, Clarke County; Rhea Tays Fulmer, Lauderdale County; Robert Mike Berry and Miles Robinson, Macon County; James Maze, Marshall County; Greg Norris, Monroe County; Kesler Weaver Sr., Washington County; Ricky Powell, Wilcox County.



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From left, CROAA Awards Committee representative Kirk Keith, Jacksonville State University's Belinda Blackburn, CROAA Immediate Past President Keith Caputo, and CROAA Vice President Terri Henderson



From left, CROAA Awards Committee representative Kirk Keith, Terisa Lang, CROAA Immediate Past President Keith Caputo, and CROAA Vice President Terri Henderson

## CROAA gives awards, grants certifications

The County Revenue Officers Association of Alabama gave two awards and issued professional designations during the Association of County Commissions of Alabama's annual convention.

Belinda Blackburn, Jacksonville State University's director of continuing education, received the 2011 award for Outstanding Contribution to the County Revenue Officers Association of Alabama.

"Professional development is the cornerstone of CROAA's work, and Belinda keeps our education program working," said CROAA Immediate Past President Kevin Caputo, Madison County's chief revenue examiner. "We are elevating our profession across the state, and it would not be possible without her invaluable contributions."

Madison County's Terisa Lang was named Revenue Officer of the Year for 2011 by CROAA. Lang is a revenue examiner III in Madison County's sales tax department.

"Terisa has led efforts for the continued development of our educational program," Caputo said. "Her outstanding leadership is raising the bar for our profession."

The educational program is overseen jointly by CROAA and JSU. Jefferson County revenue examiners Scott Smith and Don Williams earned designation as certified county revenue officers in 2011.

CROAA exists to promote the proficiency and professionalism of county revenue officers who oversee collection of a variety of local taxes ranging from sales taxes to lodging taxes to license fees.

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# Legislative Conference set for Nov. 30-Dec. 1

The 2011 ACCA Legislative Conference is right around the corner!

This year the Association will be heading to the “Loveliest Village” for the two-day conference at The Hotel at Auburn University. Members will come together for professional development and to finalize the Association’s 2012 legislative agenda.

Make your plans to attend now. To make a reservation, call the hotel at 800-228-2876 and use group code 10H6TS.

A full agenda will be posted online when available. In the meantime, an outline is below.

### Wednesday, Nov. 30

11 a.m. - noon ACCA Board of Directors

1:30-5 p.m. Opening General Session

5-6 p.m. Opening Reception

### Thursday, Dec. 1

8-9:15 a.m. Breakfast and 2012 Legislative Session Briefing

9:30-11:30 a.m. Breakout Sessions

11:30 a.m.-noon ACCA Business Session



*The next annual regular session of the Alabama Legislature begins Feb. 7, 2012.*

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*Continued from page 5*

As we have seen the last 12 months, his words should serve to inspire all of us to do our part and to come when needed. For, clearly, there is no one else to speak for county government except us. In fact, the environment that exists today makes it even more difficult to generate any support for our efforts outside the county “family.” Suddenly it is “politically correct” to criticize everything government does; to point fingers at each public official and to scoff at their efforts; and to speak loudly that all our problems would be solved simply by dismantling government as we know it today.

So, tonight, it is important that we all look around this room. It is important that you look in the face of those who sit on our right and on our left and realize that our success rests on our willingness to stand together. And, most importantly tonight, I submit to you that this Association will be silent if you do not stand together. We will be silent if you do not raise your unified voices in one mission to improve our communities, our counties and our state.

As we move forward with the “partnership” that has been established this year, I believe it is extremely important that we set ourselves apart from the crowded field of organizations that attempt to speak in this state. Our voice and our message are unique – we exist to improve the effective and efficient operation of counties for the benefit of the citizens of Alabama.

We don't promote and represent people who sell things, people who build things, people who want to be hired to provide services. We don't speak for people who offer repairs, who give eye exams or who negotiate

for better working conditions for employees or workers.

Although such organizations serve a very important function, we are so very different from those groups. We are a collection of people – elected officials and employees – who are active in this organization because we want to do our jobs more effectively. We're not motivated by profit or by gaining ground at the expense of another group. This Association exists to serve those back home. People who need us and the services we provide.

We are here to speak with one voice. To promote improvements in our state. To respond on those days – like April 27, 2011 – when people need help the most. To work toward the enhancement of the quality of life of everyone in Alabama. And we can do that only through an effective, well-

equipped and unified county government.

And, it is important to that mission that we move to enhance our public image, to set ourselves apart and to establish a presence – a “brand” if you will – that will help ensure that we are recognized as the voice for county government in Alabama.

All of us are here because we believe in this concept of speaking with one voice. We are here because we believe that county government is “how” and “why” our state is great. You are also here because you believe this Association must – and will – be seen as the one voice for all of county government in this state.

We can no longer continue to present a fractured and divided picture of county

*Continued on page 25*

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**By David S. Stewart**

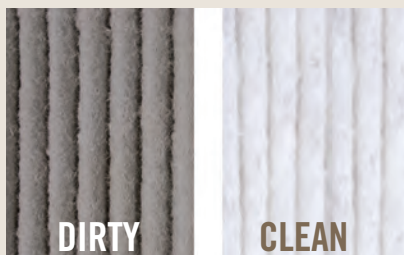
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I'll be the first one to tell you that it's easy to forget about air filters. Out of sight, out of mind, right? Well, guess what happens when you crank up the A/C or heat with a dirty air filter? That's



*A dirty air filter chokes the airflow which reduces the effectiveness of your cooling system.*

right, you're just blowing money away. A dirty air filter wastes energy because it slows down air flow and makes your system work harder to keep you warm or cool.

The best thing you can do to maximize

your heating and cooling efficiency is to check your filter every month, especially when it's really hot or really cold outside.

At a minimum, you should change the filter every three months. Most filters are really inexpensive and it may make sense to just buy a bunch of them to have on hand.



Just remember: a dirty air filter can cost you more than a clean one.

.....  
*For more heating and cooling tips, visit [AlabamaPower.com/tips](http://AlabamaPower.com/tips).*  
.....



*Continued from page 23*

government – with elected officials and offices pulling in different directions and with conflicting messages. The enemies outside county government are too strong and too numerous. We must pull together.

Our collective strength must be, well...our collective strength. Those who choose to stand alone really have little chance of success in today's environment.

Throughout this convention we've asked you to volunteer to be a part of our efforts. The forms are outside this room so you have one last chance to take a more active role in your Association. We need you. We cannot succeed as well without you. I hope you'll join me in pledging to be more active this year.

We started an effort to reunify county government years ago with the establishment of our affiliate organizations. And in recent years they have grown and expanded to be an essential and core function of our Association. You see up here tonight the presidents of those organizations. Throughout the year their efforts are a unifying and a strengthening voice for us.

And this year we worked very closely with sheriffs on the passage of legislation related to immunity for jailers and with tax officials on a host of legislative initiatives that benefited all of county government. Just last month our executive director was here at this hotel to offer that unifying hand to the tax officials organization and, while here, also participated in the annual conference of the Alabama Probate Judges Association.

A fully coordinated and unified effort at the county commission level cannot be achieved in one year or even in one

term in office. Remember, the charge of the president is to begin projects he can complete in a year and to set in motion other projects that can be carried forward by the next person in line.

I am proud to announce that we are ready to embark on an effort to provide tangible evidence of our new message as one voice for county government. There are, in fact, 67 of us – but we must speak with that one voice.

Later this year we will initiate a new "branding" project designed to emphasize and enhance our Association's role as one voice of county government. As the year progresses, you will see this new "brand" for the Association in many ways.

This entire project will be focused on enhancing our identity and creating a message that this Association – that each of us – is working on a unified course to seek improvements for and the protection of county government. This project will result in a new visual "image" for the Association all the way down to the lapel pin that most of you will wear. You'll see a major change in our web presence, letter head, publications – everything that carries the "name" of the Association will also carry the "theme" of a unified voice

for counties.

And, at the same time, we must expand our efforts to reach out to everyone in county government. We must speak with one voice. We must present a unified front. And we must stand together.

Our collective strength is, after all...our collective strength. If we have not learned that over the years, we haven't been paying attention.

This project is exciting and it will change the way our Association is recognized throughout Alabama and nationwide. It will improve our visibility statewide and, in the years to come, it will serve to benefit all our counties. This new "brand" for the Association will not change our mission; rather it will enhance and support it. The new theme will focus on our 67 counties and their one collective, unified voice.

We can only speak with that one voice if we all accept the challenge to come when we are called, to offer our services and to do whatever we can to ensure our success. The desire to speak with one voice brought us together tonight and it will be our willingness to speak with one voice will ensure our success this year and well beyond.



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