

# COUNTY COMMISSION

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a white lab coat and a blue hairnet, is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is holding a metal tray with three glass jars filled with a red substance, likely jam or preserves. She is standing in front of a large commercial oven or sterilizer. The background shows a stainless steel kitchen environment with a large window.

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## **What's Inside...**

Growing  
Entrepreneurs

Profile: Ray Long





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*Local partnerships in Chilton County mean local entrepreneurs have access to markets that previously were closed to them. Food scientist Christy Mendoza sorts through fresh persimmons.*

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*Hon. Debbie Wood  
President*

*Debbie Wood*

## Emergency managers do outstanding job preparing to respond to disasters in Alabama

But at some point, county governments need more financial help dealing with these events

When you are snowed in, you have a great deal of time for reflection. And in the last few weeks Old Man Winter has made sure we've had plenty of time to reflect on the impact of emergency situations.

Certainly we are accustomed to the unpredictable force of tornadoes in the spring. And during the fall we all keep one eye on the Gulf of Mexico for the next hurricane. But it's been a very long time since Alabama faced winter storms with the power that kept most of us indoors for several days already this year.

The challenges of preparing for and responding to winter problems – frozen bridges, icy roads, closing schools, loss of power – are unique. But the need for professionals at the helm who can plan for and respond to ice and snow is just as essential as being ready for those wind and water events that usually cause us to stop and think.

And the importance of emergency services is the reason that the Alabama Association of Emergency Managers became one of our affiliate groups a few years ago. In the years that have passed, county officials in our state have become more attuned to the need for strong emergency planning, response and recovery. Together we have increased local support for emergency activities and, in the process, we've helped raise the public's awareness of their own responsibilities.

The horrible tornadoes of April 2011 devastated our state and focused the national spotlight on the professionalism of our county and state EMA departments. Our performance

was recognized by everyone who came to our state.

A natural outgrowth of our affiliation with AAEM and the close relationship with the state Emergency Management Agency is a week-long event this spring that will focus on emergency situations.

The first-ever State of Alabama Governor's Preparedness Conference is scheduled for March 31-April 3 here in Montgomery. There will be hands-on training for both the professional emergency personnel as well as the elected officials who are often at the eye of the storm when things get off track. (Find out more at [www.alabamacounties.org/?p=5051](http://www.alabamacounties.org/?p=5051))

I am pleased that our outstanding state EMA director, Art Faulkner, has so much confidence in the Association that he asked us to be his partner in bringing even more attention to our responsibilities during these events.

In fact, ACCA is teaming up with the state on another project this year too. There is legislation moving at the State House right now that would authorize the state EMA to donate equipment and supplies directly to a county EMA. If it becomes law, it would be yet another tool to help state and county governments collaborate more smoothly.

Another of our affiliate groups, the Association of County Engineers of Alabama, is turning its attention to the issue of limiting traffic on those roads and bridges that have been impacted by an unexpected event. We expect the county engineers to spend a portion of their annual conference this spring on



## Disaster events, even those that produce a beautiful blanket of snow, should not place our local governments at a financial crossroads

coordinating a more unified approach and consistent terminology to the issue of “closing” county roads to motorists. While waiting out the snow, I was also reminded that just a few years ago we worked with AAEM to convince Alabama’s Legislature to establish a program to help counties and cities as they deal with the growing costs of responding to and repairing after disaster events. The 2009 law created the Alabama Disaster Recovery Fund, which is designed to provide financial assistance when the event is not severe enough to qualify for federal assistance.

In those cases, the county must still repair infrastructure damage but usually has no available local moneys to pay for the costs.

The law called for a committee to establish guidelines for reimbursement payments to counties and cities for infrastructure repairs and replacement. The group, chaired by Elmore County EMA Director Eric Jones, did an outstanding job and established a framework that will provide assistance when it is needed most.

There’s just one problem: the program has not yet been funded. Without this support, the costs associated with this

winter’s storms will come directly from the county budgets. And the result, there will be less money to fund other programs and projects.

We are doing all we can by emphasizing planning, professionalism, response and recovery. But as the winter weather gives way to spring – and its own set of disaster concerns – it is time to take the next step.

Disaster events, even those that produce a beautiful blanket of snow, should not place our local governments at a financial crossroads. The program is ready to operate and it is time to find a way to make funding a priority.



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*Sonny Brasfield*  
*Executive Director*

*Sonny Brasfield*

## New group of legislative leaders turn attention to prison woes?

Looming threat of federal takeover gives urgency to long-running issue

Problems with our state prison system -- and the obvious impact on the 67 county jails -- have quietly slipped onto the radar of the Legislature's top brass in this election-year legislative session.

Before you jump to conclusions, there will be no groundbreaking legislation this session; probably not any legislation at all. But the signs are all there. Once the smoke clears from the 2014 elections, the crisis in our prison system must have some real and meaningful attention.

Early in this year's session Sen. Cam Ward, a Republican from Shelby County, sponsored and passed a resolution creating the 23-member Alabama Prison Reform Task Force. That, standing alone, is not really news in Alabama. We've created similar groups on several different occasions with little or no real success in dealing with the core problems.

But the language in this resolution has a completely different tone than that used in other similar resolutions. The document, now signed into law by Gov. Robert Bentley, says the "overcrowding and understaffing of Alabama prisons have created a potential federal takeover of the state prison system."

Later, it states as fact that Alabama's prisons are among the most overcrowded in the nation and that the state "spends less per inmate than any other state corrections system in the nation." And it concludes by stating, the "Legislature needs to take proactive steps to avert the looming overcrowding crisis."

After spending three decades in

Montgomery, we certainly recognize that the gap between speaking and doing is consistently expansive and full of political traps. But movement -- any movement -- on this issue causes county government to stand at attention as overcrowding is certainly not confined to the state prison facilities.

Alabama's county jails have often been used as an insurance policy when state overcrowding has become too difficult to navigate. In fact, the problem became so acute more than a decade ago that Alabama counties made national news when they challenged the state in court, arguing that "state inmates" are the responsibility of the state and not the county commission.

The court eventually agreed with the county argument and, in the years since, the overcrowding issue has slipped quietly to the back burner without being solved at any level. Clearly, no solution to this boiling state crisis will leave county jails untouched.

Nor should any reform efforts focus only on the state problem -- as operating the county jails is no less costly and difficult than solving the crisis that looms over the state system.

A few weeks after Sen. Ward's resolution was enacted, the House and Senate leadership convened a team, which included the Association, to begin discussions on what was termed an "outside the box" perspective on this continuing problem. We reminded the group that, at the county commission level, law enforcement and jail operation accounts for about half of the expenditures from the county general fund budget. So our ears come



## Alabama's prison system is among the most overcrowded in the country, and the state spends less per inmate than any other state corrections system in the United States.

to attention anytime this subject pushes its way to the forefront of legislative concern.

The commissioner of the Department of Corrections readily admits that he has been able to flow prisoners from the county jails into his system in compliance with the existing court order, at least in part, because several county jails are housing state prisoners for \$15 per day. Certainly a deal like that one cannot continue for the long-term as counties are less able to absorb the costs than the state.

So, when this year's session concludes, we'll again saddle up and be part of another task force to search for a solution to overcrowding in our prison system. Even before we get started, everyone, including those with little

training or knowledge about prison administration, can put their finger right on the problem.

The state's prisons are old and in, in many cases, beyond repair. Alabama's "tough on crime" political philosophy results in the incarceration of prisoners at an alarming rate. Our county jails are not designed or operated in a fashion that allows them to be long-term housing facilities. Community corrections has worked to impact the problem, but it is not the magic serum to solve the mounting issues. We spend little money on drug programs and invest only slightly in organized efforts to transition former inmates into society in a productive way.

The touchstone of the problem is, and always has been, right before our eyes.

In fact, Sen. Ward's resolution says it straight out – Alabama's prison system is among the most overcrowded in the country, and the state spends less per inmate than any other state corrections system in the United States.

At a time when the state's general fund budget faces a major crisis – and the Legislature is about to spend the last of some \$430 million it "borrowed" from the Alabama Trust Fund two years ago just to hold things together – the question is not whether our leaders recognize that we're headed for disaster. Everyone can see that.

Rather, the real question is how much longer can the state seek to solve a "money" problem without generating more money?

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Mary E. Pons  
Association Counsel

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

## Severe winter weather calls for advance planning, quick thinking

Counties can set policies well before roads begin to ice that make it easier to respond to in emergencies

Severe weather can be a huge inconvenience as we have all witnessed this winter. Even Montgomery, which usually avoids the most brutal winter weather, was shut down in January because of ice-covered roads. For the county, it is more than just an inconvenience. It is a time when quick decisions must be made for the safety of its citizens and staff. Unfortunately, the commission is often caught off guard and not quite sure what actions to take – or what procedures should be followed to react to the emergency situation. In these situations, the governing body does what it has to do and sometimes waives formalities. Generally, these quick decisions are supported because of the circumstances. Nonetheless, the county commission should be familiar with the procedures required under the law for closing county offices and/or roads. And it should establish policies for handling emergencies when the sun is shining so it can properly respond when the clouds cover the sky.

The county commission has control over the courthouse and other county buildings. (See, Ala. Code § 11-3-11(a) (1).) And there is substantial authority for the commission to close these buildings when warranted. Ala. Code § 11-1-8 states the county commission “may by resolution close the offices in the county courthouse or other county buildings . . . for special circumstances deemed necessary or appropriate.” Additionally, Ala. Code § 31-9-10(b)(6) authorizes the county commission, “To close, notwithstanding Section 11-1-8, any and all public buildings . . . under the control of the political subdivision

where emergency conditions warrant.” Note that in all these code sections, the authority is granted to the county governing body – not the county EMA director or other staff person, not the presiding circuit judge, and not the chair of the commission. As we often discuss, the county commission acts as a body. No one member can take action on behalf of the county absent a vote of the body or a delegation of authority – by the body.

During Alabama’s recent weather emergencies, many counties were given sufficient warning to call a special meeting and vote as a body to close the courthouse and county offices due to inclement weather. Unfortunately, some counties were caught off guard and did not have time to follow the procedures required by law. Most took the action anyway, and under the circumstances, it is unlikely there will be any negative consequences. But it left many counties scrambling – and precipitated many calls to the ACCA office before and after the event for advice on how to handle the situation.

Where time permits, it is always advisable that the commission call an emergency meeting under the procedures in Ala. Code § 11-3-8 to plan for an impending emergency. Sometimes this is just not possible, such as in the case of a tornado or other event that hits without warning. Therefore, it is recommended the county have written policies adopted by the governing body setting out procedures for addressing circumstances in an emergency. This could be authorizing the chair, in consultation with appropriate agency



**During Alabama's recent weather emergencies, many counties were given sufficient warning to call a special meeting and vote as a body to close the courthouse and county offices due to inclement weather. Unfortunately, some counties were caught off guard and did not have time to follow the procedures required by law.**

heads or others, to take limited action such as closing the courthouse or sending staff home. And these policies should include procedures for getting notice to the media, other county officials, and, in the case of the courthouse, the presiding circuit judge. And these emergency policies should be limited to circumstances when the body cannot meet – and should remain in place only until it can.

The closing of the courthouse and other offices has significant consequences not always considered during the emergency, such as filing deadlines or tax due dates. The code sections authorizing the commission to close the courthouse extend these deadlines when such action is taken, but this is not the case if another official closes his or her office. Moreover, county personnel policies in place for payment of county employees when offices are closed due to inclement weather or otherwise only apply when the commission has directed the closure. If another official keeps his or her office closed when the commission has reopened county offices, the employees in that office will not be entitled to the treatment granted in an emergency closure and the examiners will require this absence be treated as leave.

And now a word or two about “closure” of county roads. Ala. Code § 11-3-11(a)(1), referenced above, also

authorizes the commission to close roads. (See also, Ala. Code §§ 23-1-80 and 23-1-3.) Again, it is the county commission and not any individual granted this authority. Therefore, again, it is strongly advised that there be written policy in place outlining procedures to follow when the commission cannot meet.

It is also extremely important in this instance that the county be careful about what action it takes – and how actions are articulated to the public.<sup>1</sup> To legally “close” a road, the road must be posted and barricaded to prevent access. This is not generally done when a road is temporarily closed due to weather conditions. Counties do not have the time, equipment or manpower to physically close every road that should not be travelled during an ice storm. Instead, the county should warn of the “treacherous conditions” and strongly advise against travel on county roads. This is important for many

reasons, not the least of which is the county's potential liability in the event it indicated that a road was closed but access was still available and a traveler was injured as a result of the dangerous conditions.

It is impossible to cover every aspect of planning for an emergency in one column, but hopefully this helps counties recognize the need for planning and the importance of quick commission action during a weather emergency – an all too common event in Alabama. Counties are encouraged to have an emergency plan ready to execute when the event does take place – and to make sure county officials and staff know how to put that plan into effect.

<sup>1</sup>This topic will be discussed at the ACEA Annual Conference in May, and it is anticipated county engineers will be presented with sample policies to take home for consideration by the county commission.



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# Profile: ACCA Second Vice President Ray Long

Ray Long likes to see things happen. Good things. Like increased grants. People moving into an area instead of away from it. More and better paying jobs. That's the reason Long made the decision to run for country commission chairman of Morgan County. He's been in his post for the past three years and trusts that he's brought leadership to the position.

We had good folks in the past, but I thought we were just lacking in leadership, so I decided to run. Things were just sort of at a standstill, and I thought we ought to be able to move our county forward," Long observes. During his tenure with the Morgan County Commission, the county's reserve fund has grown from essentially zero to \$2 million, its unemployment rate has been halved to around six percent, and services have been maintained and streamlined.

It wasn't if Long, who is 54, hadn't had some prior practice. Serving on the town of Somerville's city council and as its mayor for a combined total of 14 years, Long saw that community nearly double in population, annexations that enlarged the town's geographical size, a program which upgraded water lines as well as sewer service and grants for development totaling some \$4 million. Prior to his political career he worked for 21 years with General Electric in Decatur. Long also serves on the board of the Joe Wheeler Electric Co-op. A near life-long resident of Morgan County, Long and his wife Regina have three grown daughters and three grandchildren.

If tradition holds true, Long will become president of the ACCA in 2015. He credits ACCA with helping him make the transition from leadership of a small town—population 700-- to a county with a population of some 120,000. "I have only one more class at the second level of the ACCA training program, and that outreach of ACCA has been very beneficial in helping me understand the appropriate roles not just for commissioners but county engineers and administrative personnel. Everyone has a place and a role



to play and it has been extremely helpful in my term as a commission chair," Long says.

Long also credits ACCA training in helping him deal with media issues. "As a mayor of a small town, I never heard from the press, but now I hear from reporters almost daily. Knowing how to respond in a positive manner to their questions is very important and ACCA training has made me much more comfortable with doing that."

When given the opportunity, Long advises newly elected officials to get active and stay active in ACCA. "I tell them to put Sonny and Mary's phone numbers next to their phones and when they have questions, don't be afraid to call and ask questions. They work hard for us and asking for help isn't a sign of weakness, it is a sign that you care for your county and its citizens." Long also praises ACCA for keeping county commissions abreast of the latest legislative



## From the Cover

# Once the election is over and you take office, it's time to put partisanship aside and do what is best for your entire county.

activities in Montgomery and their effect on county governments.

“Ray Long has already been a tremendous addition to ACCA's Board of Directors, and his service is very much appreciated,” said Sonny Brasfield, executive director of ACCA. “Since first joining the commission in Morgan County, he has embraced this Association and its work to support all 67 counties. He brings extraordinary energy to the job, and it is a privilege to work with him to advance county government in Alabama.”

Challenges abound for Morgan County and Alabama as a whole, Long believes, particularly in the area of road maintenance. “The price of gas goes up, and people use less and new cars are more economical, but the gas tax, which we are dependent upon for so much, is the same as it has been for years. That means in real terms that we are challenged to do more with less every year.” Long knows that voters are not supportive of tax hikes, so the challenge is to find ways not to reduce services. “It makes it difficult when you know you need to do something and the funds just aren't there.”

Perhaps one of the remarkable things Long can point to in his leadership is forging a cohesive county government for Morgan County. “In the past three years there's been only a single time when a vote wasn't unanimous,” he reports. “Sure you have party affiliations, but once the election is over and you take office, it's time to put partisanship aside and do what is best for your entire county.” Long says he believes the sorts of programs and practices fostered by ACCA can assist in helping county commissioners get past short-sighted viewpoints and work together for the good of the public.



The attorneys and staff of Webb & Eley, P. C. support and appreciate all of the county commissioners and their staff.

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# Chilton County Food Innovation Center building a new generation of food entrepreneurs

By James Landcuster, Alabama Cooperative Extension Service



J. Sam Johnson can't stand the fact that as much as 50 percent of the fruits and vegetables produced in his native Chilton County have been discarded because of over-ripeness or inadequate size.

"It's one of the things I've heard about all my life," Johnson says. "We're throwing away produce even when it's totally usable."

Another issue for Johnson and others is that so many processed foods sold in jars at local vendor and retail outlets in this agricultural county are actually made from Georgia products, even though the items often bear a Chilton County address.

Johnson, a retired Houston-based oil company executive who now lives in

Montgomery, wanted to do something to change things. Joining him were two Chilton County educators: the Alabama Cooperative Extension System's Chilton County Coordinator Gay West and Jim Pitts, director of the nearby Chilton Research and Extension Center.

Cost was the biggest obstacle to creating processed food from local products. Alabama law requires that all retail foods be processed within an inspected kitchen — a requirement that put food processing beyond the financial reach of most aspiring entrepreneurs.

The solution came with an unexpected donation of industrial kitchen equipment to the Research and Extension Center and a lot of

community support, including the Chilton County Commission.

"(A community kitchen) is an idea that has been tossed around for a long time," West says, explaining that local growers could use the kitchen to process their surplus produce into profitable items. "Unfortunately, it's a big undertaking and something that only a couple of people could do on their own."

With the donated equipment and promise of kitchen and cafeteria space in a used middle school, West and Pitts moved ahead to get expert help from Dr. Jean Weese, an Alabama Extension food safety specialist and Auburn University professor of nutrition and food science. They also called together a focus group of central Alabama growers and local community leaders.

Financial support came from a Specialty Crops Grant from the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries and funding from the Cawaco Resource and Development Council. The Chilton County Commission assisted with surplus equipment purchases and underwrites part of the salary for food scientist Christy Mendoza, who today runs the Chilton County Food Innovation Center (CFIC).



# From the Cover

## A Longstanding Partnership: County Commissions and Cooperative Extension

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System provides educational outreach to Alabamians in all 67 counties on behalf of the state's two historic land grant universities: Alabama A&M University and Auburn University. From the beginning, support for the system has come from all levels of government.

As early as 1910, county funding supplemented the salaries of 37 agents working in 41 Alabama counties. County commissions continue to be key to this work today, as Alabama Extension works to enlist financial support from public and private partners.



*Commercial kitchen equipment installed at the Food Innovation Center*

Any grower with an acidified food trying to move a product into retail sales is eligible to use the center, Mendoza says. All that is required is filling out an application, subject to the CFIC board's approval.

According to organizers, all levels of state and local government supported the effort.

"Whenever you undertake a collaborative project of such a magnitude in a county, your first priority is to enlist the support of all the major public and private players and, first and foremost, the support of both county and city governments," West says, adding the support of the Chilton County Commission has been unwavering.

Two Commission members characterize this effort as a testament to the value of local partnerships.

Heedy Hayes, completing his sixth term as a commissioner, praises the partnership that made CIFC possible.

"It really is a great example of partnerships — but, after all, you only get things done when people work together."

Commission Vice Chairman Joe Headley says he has always based his governing philosophy on a central tenet: that he is willing to spend county money only in the way that he would expect other people to spend his money. CIFC is especially appealing because it offers great economic potential for the community at an affordable cost, as well as flexibility for growers who want to try something new.

"It allows someone to try out a product without investing too much money," Headley says. "They can put their product in store shelves and let consumers try it out."

Johnson, a CFIC board member, says the center operates with that goal in mind.

"Where would I like to see this in terms of grand, long-term impact?" Johnson asks. "I want to see it develop as a small-business incubator that spawns multiple successful businesses that draw from the produce of Alabama."

James C. Langcuster is a communications specialist with the Cooperative Extension Service

# Houston County Road and Bridge Department honored for outstanding safety record

For going more than a year without a reportable injury, the Houston County Road and Bridge Department was recently honored by the Association of County Commissions of Alabama's Liability Self-Insurance Fund.

The 92 -person department is headed by County Engineer Barkley Kirkland. Houston County is one of the few counties in the state to have a full-time safety director, with that role filled by Kelly Crowell for the past four years.

Skyrocketing insurance costs brought focus to the need for a safe work environment says Crowell. "Last year we were able to save some \$300,000 in insurance costs and this helped the county to give employees a three percent pay hike. That sort of thing makes a huge difference in motivating employees to work safely."

Kirkland agrees. "Our rates were going through the roof. We realized that safety wasn't one of those things which employees were being judged on during their annual performance reviews. Adding that to the items gone over with the employee has made a difference as well in getting people tuned into doing their job with an emphasis on safety."

Over the last couple of years, the ACCA Self-Insurance Funds have been working statewide to help county employees avoid injuries to themselves and others, and it was an easy decision to recognize the achievement in Houston County, said Henry van Arcken, ACCA's director of insurance services.

"This is a terrific example of what can happen when a county takes its safety efforts, top to bottom, to another level. Despite the built-in dangers of the work performed by road and bridge employees, injuries don't have to be a given," van Arcken said, "and the financial savings can add up quickly."

Houston County has a safety committee chaired by Kirkland, and made up of a representative of the road and bridge department supervisors and a representative from the county's sanitation division. Road and bridge crews meet weekly for a "toolbox" safety meeting on Tuesday mornings as well. The meetings are intended to foster a culture of safety that spreads throughout the county's workforce.

Even though, as a governmental entity, the county is exempt from OSHA regulations, supervisors have attended OSHA 10-hour training courses, Crowell points out. "We also hold training courses in areas such as excavation safety, flagging safety and other subjects which involve the sort of work our department engages in."

Houston County is even spreading the training to surrounding counties. Kirkland pointed out that when a recent safety training workshop had extra seats available, neighboring Henry County was invited to send workers to the training session.

Crowell uses trend analysis with spreadsheets to spot areas that need attention. This tool helped highlight a series of incidents when equipment was moving in reverse. In these cases, no person was injured and property damage was minor, but these incidents could have been much worse. "We made changes in our backing policy, making sure that there is always a spotter when equipment is reversed, and even re-routed some layouts in our road and bridge yard to reduce the need for backing up."

Trend analysis also allows Crowell to spot employees that may be involved in "near misses" or other incidents. "Those are high risk employees and you can work with them to make them more aware of the need to work safely and prevent an injury even before it happens."



## News You Can Use



*The ACCA Self-Insurance Funds recently provided a barbecue lunch for the Houston County Road and Bridge Department and presented Houston County officials with a resolution in honor of their safety record. Pictured, from left: Commissioner Melinda McClendon, Commission Chairman Mark Culver, County Engineer Barkley Kirkland, Safety Director Kelly Crowell, ACCA Director of Insurance Services Henry van Arcken, Commissioner Douglas Siquefield and Bill Dempsey, the county's chief administrative officer*

Where private employers can use incentives such as prizes, cash gifts and similar motivational tools, county governments obviously are unable to do so, Kirkland admits. "We did hold a cookout and let the crews off early in recognition of their safe work habits and that certainly was appreciated by all. It is a team effort and it was our intention to recognize them for what they did."

Another feature of working safely is communicating. "Any time you are engaged in planning a project or detailing how a job is to be performed, we try to emphasize the need for safety and spot potential trouble spots in advance of the job even getting started. It's a lot easier to plan ahead for safe working practices rather than making things up on the fly," Crowell says.

Even so, things are never completely perfect in the world of safety. One small incident occurred not long ago, but Crowell points out that the county road and bridge department has worked now for 468 days with only one medical treatment case. "You can never look back in safety work. You have to constantly look forward and keep it in the forefront of everyone's mind. Just a small amount of inattention can lead to an accident."

Kirkland agrees that the program is one that has to be constantly promoted to employees. "But when they realize that working safely can put more money in their pockets at the end of the year, then that makes the job easier."

## Public service, a Green family tradition

Blount County's Chris Green follows in his father's footsteps in dual role as probate judge and county commissioner

Chris Green, Probate Judge and County Commission chairman of Blount County, remembers supper table conversations with his father Frank, who served in the same capacity between 1977 and 1995. "I saw the impact which he had on the lives of other and all of the interesting things with which he dealt with." While those conversations didn't lead to an immediate aspiration for political office, a series of later events eventually led Green into the office his father held for three six-year terms.

Green relates that his father was working as a bookkeeper for a local oil jobber in the 1960s when the then-Probate Judge and Chairman J.P. King hired him to be the county clerk. Fast



*Blount County Probate Judge and Chairman Chris Green, left, shakes hands with Geneva County Probate Judge and Chairman Fred Hamic at a meeting of the ACCA Workers' Compensation Self-Insurers' Fund Board of Trustees shortly after Green joined the board.*



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# News You Can Use

forward 30 years, Chris Green was a local cattle and poultry farmer when J.P. King's son Royce, who was also probate judge/chairman, approached him in 1995 with an offer to become the county administrator. After nine years in that post, Green ran for and was elected revenue commissioner of Blount County. He was appointed to the probate judge/county commission chair for the balance of his predecessor's term by Gov. Robert Bentley and then ran unopposed for the seat in 2012.

Green took his job as county administrator seriously, studying with Jacksonville State University and Troy State University to become a certified

administrator after his third year in the job.

Blount County is one of only thirteen counties which still combine the role of probate judge with the county commission chair. While two larger counties, Tuscaloosa and Lee, still have that setup, other counties have separated the jobs.

"Judge Green was uniquely prepared for the job, so he hit the ground running from the very beginning," said Sonny Brasfield, ACCA executive director. "I know the people of Blount County appreciate his leadership, and ACCA appreciates his willingness to share his

time on an effort that benefits counties statewide."

Green is serving a three-year term on the ACCA Workers' Compensation Self-Insurers' Fund Board of Trustees. The fund provides coverage for 58 counties and 23 other government entities around the state.

The rough weather of the 2014 winter has taken its toll on Blount County's road network, Green admits. Road work is always a very high priority. "The nearly 60,000 people of Blount County have 1,100 miles of road that they use. There's never enough money to do adequate maintenance that you would

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## News You Can Use

like to.” Green praises ACCA for helping counties with their maintenance challenges and Governor Bentley for his ATRP program. “It has helped us with our major collector roads, but there are still challenges to be faced,” Green says.

“People are not interested in paying more taxes, so we are trying hard to find revenue enhancing economic development which would aid Blount County’s revenue stream,” Green says.

Green says wearing two hats keeps things interesting. “You schedule your probate court cases, and you have to prepare for them, but the county commission is a dynamic thing. I may

come into the office in the morning, expecting a smooth day, and find that we have had a major mechanical breakdown in the jail for instance. The way I look at it, you take some deep breaths, cinch up your belt and hope for the best. If at the end of the day you can leave under your own power, it’s been a good day,” he laughs.

Green has been married to his wife Pam Hunt Green for 34 years and lives in Blount County’s Nectar community. The Greens have two daughters, Hannah Maze, a first-grade teacher at Susan Moore Elementary, and Mary Grace Hicks, a seventh-grade teacher at Hayden Middle School. He graduated

with a music education degree from Wallace State Community College. In addition to his work with Blount County, Green also has served as a bi-vocational music minister for several churches, and is currently working with the First Baptist Church of Cleveland. He still keeps a small herd of cattle as well.

“I find public service a great pleasure despite the challenges. I encourage good people to become involved in leadership. If good people won’t step up and serve then we end up with second best leadership. Many people do step up and we appreciate that.”

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# ‘Sophomore’ commissioners can PLAN for leadership

With the conclusion of qualifying for the 2014 party primary elections, the Association’s new leadership program moved another step closer to the starting blocks.

Though the leadership initiative will

not kick off until January of 2015, the field of possible participants was set with the closing of qualifying. Designed for those freshly elected, second-term commissioners, the two-year program will focus on growing leaders for the

Association and its many programs.

During his year as ACCA president, DeKalb County Commission President Ricky Harcrow highlighted the need to actively attract “sophomore” county commissioners who would volunteer to become directly involved in the Association’s role as the unifying voice for county government in Alabama.

“If our Association is to continue to serve in a leadership role in our state -- to speak with one voice for 67 counties -- we need to forge a stronger pathway for these new commissioners. The program will focus on commissioners who have proven they can be re-elected but are still young enough in their public service to assume leadership roles on a statewide basis,” Harcrow explained.

The Practical Leadership Action Network – or PLAN – is rooted in the idea that leadership is not some inborn trait that some people have and others lack, but that it is a set of knowledge and skills that can be learned and improved.

Authors James Kouzes and Barry Posner put this well in their book, “The Leadership Challenge,” when they wrote, “Leadership is not about who you are; it’s about what you do.”

There were some 65 first time commissioners elected in 2010. The pool of possible participants in the new program will come from the members of the “Class of 2010” who are successfully re-elected in November of 2014. There will be little time between the beginning of that second term and the start of this program, which will conclude in December of 2016 -- just in time for another group of “sophomores” to be the program’s second group.

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Commissioners entering the two-year program will be matched with one of the Association's affiliate groups, work closely with the Association's insurance programs, be actively involved in the drafting of Association policy, participate in a long-range planning retreat, have intensive exposure to the Alabama Legislature and the U.S. Congress and learn from site visits to review outstanding county programs throughout the state.

"We are excited about the program and certainly hope that those commissioners who will be seeking re-election for the first time this fall will embrace this new concept and devote the time necessary to improve the Association and their roles back home," explained Association Executive Director Sonny Brasfield.

There will also be a mentoring component, where PLAN participants are paired with effective, veteran

commissioners.

"That is something I would have loved," said ACCA President Debbie Wood, president of the Chambers County Commission. "I was first elected in 2002, and I wish we had something like PLAN when I was still learning the ropes. As elected officials, we can learn so much from each other

## Leadership is not about who you are; it's about what you do.

*The Leadership Challenge*  
by Kouzes and Posner

that can benefit our own counties."

Although many of the details of the program must still be finalized, Brasfield points out that it will be different from a "traditional" leadership program that focuses on building leadership skills and involvement in the

community. "We want this program to be more focused on what it means to contribute both in your home county and on a statewide level," he explained.

"This Association is long benefitted from statewide leaders who have worked to improve all of county government, not simply their own county or district. Hopefully this program will take hold and be attractive to commissioners from all over the state," Harcrow continued.

"Our vision was a program for 12 or 15 commissioners who understand the importance of 'leading' for this Association and for their state. In just a few months we'll begin to contact everyone from the 'Class of 2010' to see who is interested."

Commissioners interested in receiving an application for PLAN when they become available should contact Sallie Gowan at [sgowan@alabamacounties.org](mailto:sgowan@alabamacounties.org).



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# Hands-on learning: Road supervisors put book knowledge into action

County road and bridge department staff members who came to the 2014 Road Supervisors Training in January may have thought they would be spending all their time indoors.

But after a bit of classroom time, the entire group headed outside for a hands-on exercise that let them put into action some of the things they had covered.

The segment was called a Work Zone Design Workshop, and participants were presented with three scenarios and then asked to set up the proper signs and flaggers on a scaled-down road site.

Each scenario called for participants to lay out proper temporary traffic control



*Autauga County Foreman Henry Lanier, left, and Assistant County Engineer Daniel Lundy from Chambers County strategically position signs for their mock work zone.*

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measures. In one example, they had to prepare for repairing the damaged outer half of one lane for a length of 50 feet. The two-lane road was in a rural area with a 45-mph speed limit, and the damaged section was near a curve. Traffic volume was 500 vehicles a day, including 10 percent truck traffic due to a nearby timber mill.

In each case, participants were reminded that the first thing they should do in preparation is to consult the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, published by the Federal Highway Administration, to see if it describes a scenario that matches the work they will be doing. Each participant received a copy of the manual.

“Controlling traffic is the key. You’re informing the public,” explained Bruce Bylmsa, an instructor for the day and a loss control representative from Meadowbrook Insurance Group.

ACCA contracts with Meadowbrook for administration of the self-insurance funds specializing in liability and workers’ compensation coverage. “You’ve got to have that step-by-step approach. If you cut any of that out, you are going to have problems.”

A driver entering a work zone should encounter a preconstruction area with signage and flagging to provide

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## News You Can Use

advance warning, a buffer area and then the actual workspace, he said. And the proper distances can vary based on speed limits, terrain and other factors specific to the site. “You want to be consistent,” he said. “You want to give the same instructions to drivers as they would in any other county.”

Joenathan Jordan, assistant county engineer in Lowndes County, said the event provided much-needed training for staff members, training that can be hard to find. And he appreciates the emphasis on safety.

“I preach safety, safety,” he said. “I want my guys to go home to their families at the end of the day.”

Ed Ward, a sign superintendent and certified flagger from Perry County, said it was exciting to put his skills to the test. “You always want to improve. If I’m doing something improper, I want to correct it,” he said. “And then I can take it back to someone else.”

Elmore County Engineer Richie Beyer said the hands-on learning activity was patterned on training provided by Meadowbrook Insurance Group for road and bridge staffers in his county. He gave the road supervisors who convened from all over the state high marks.

“They did a good job and were fairly educated on why they need to set things up the way they did,” he said.

Counties in the ACCA Self-Insurance Funds can arrange a similar training for their staff members by contacting their loss-control representative from Meadowbrook.

Many of the presentations and handouts from the Road Supervisors Training are available at [www.acea-online.org](http://www.acea-online.org). The second day of the training class was planned to include special information for safety directors in road and bridge departments, but that day’s sessions were canceled due to weather. ACCA will inform counties as soon as those sessions are rescheduled.

See this demonstration in your county. See page 29



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