The Alabama Municipal JOURNAL

September/October 2018 Volume 76, Number 2

Rural Alabama

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#LiveLocallyAlabama

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On the Cover:

"Shelter" by Alabama artist Barbara Davis, who has been painting since she was 14 and has a degree in Fine Art from Auburn University Montgomery. Barbara paints in oil and, since she loves to paint the effect of light, her subject matter is across the board – from landscapes and still life to portraits, figures and animals. For more about Barbara and her fine art paintings, visit **www.barbaradavisart.com**.

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Rural Alabama Opportunities and Challenges

This issue of the *Alabama Municipal Journal* focuses on **Rural Alabama** – a topic that's not only critical for the entire state, but one that's dear to me personally.

It was my good fortune to grow up in a rural Southern town nestled securely within the coastal plain of southeastern North Carolina – a town that has remained a sparsely populated farming community of approximately 1,800 since its inception in the early 20th century. It's a quiet, unassuming place cared for by several generations of steady, friendly folk accustomed to agricultural lifestyles and focused, daily routines. My parents and a plethora of aunts, uncles and cousins still live and work there as well as the surrounding area. I left my hometown when I was 18, but it never left me. Throughout college, graduate school, my professional career and personal life, bits and pieces of my solid, small-town upbringing have continually influenced my direction. I will always appreciate my heritage and the people who bestowed me the values I live by today. Therefore, I'm especially humbled when I have the opportunity to visit the people and places of rural Alabama, and I'm particularly proud of the *Journal* you're now reading.

Thomasville Mayor Sheldon Day and ALM Communications Director Carrie Banks

Alabama is composed primarily of small cities and towns. Several regions are steadily losing population, which presents many challenges we must address. Even so, there are also *opportunities* – including examples of collaboration and leadership that have generated impressive success stories arising from a steadfast refusal to accept the status quo. The Black Belt city of Thomasville, located in one of Alabama's poorest regions, is such an example and is the Live Locally Alabama feature for this issue beginning on page 11. My sincere thanks to Mayor Sheldon Day and his dedicated team for taking the time to discuss their ongoing journey with me and to show me their thriving community and why they are so proud of its accomplishments.

I am especially grateful to Dr. Joe Sumners, Executive Director of Auburn University's Government & Economic Development Institute (GEDI), for his thought-provoking "Rural Resilience" article (page 7) that sets the stage for a closer look at rural Alabama. Dr. Sumners and I serve together on several boards and committees that work with rural issues; he is passionate about this topic. In addition, GEDI recently released *Alabama Issues 2018*, a collection of short, research-based articles intended to stimulate public discussion to improve public policy and practice. To request a copy, visit auburn.edu/gedi and click on "resources" then "publications".

My thanks to ADECA for their article on two federal assistance programs vital to rural Alabama (DRA and ARC) and to Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association, DesignAlabama and Main Street Alabama for their excellent submissions as well as the many resources and invaluable support they provide to communities throughout the state.

This *Journal* also features a sobering overview of Alabama's rural health crisis on page 29 by Dale Quinney, former executive director of the Alabama Rural Health Association; a workforce development quick guide by Austin Monk, Director of Workforce Training Solutions with Wallace State Community College, on page 33; and a very interesting article on page 17 about digital equality in rural areas (#Rural2pt0) by Dr. Roberto Gallardo, Director of the Purdue Center for Regional Development and a senior fellow at the Center for Rural Strategies.

Thank you also to Nisa Miranda, Director of the University of Alabama Center for Economic Development, for the excellent resource list beginning on page 21. Nisa has long been an advocate for Alabama's municipalities and many of you probably know her well. She is a wealth of knowledge and ideas and she and her team are an invaluable resource for our state.

Alabama is a special place. We have much to be thankful for and many reasons to keep striving for excellence – to rise above status quo!

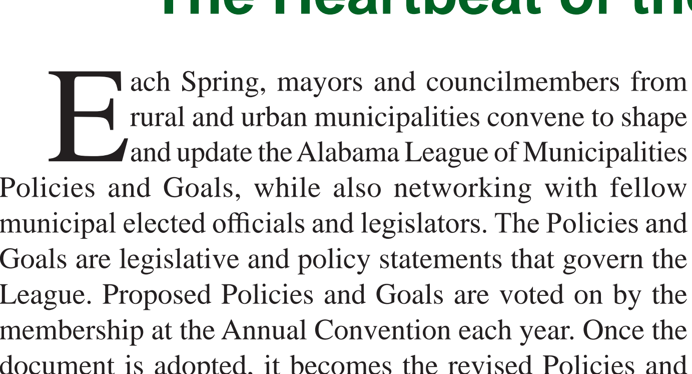
#LiveLocallyAlabama

Carrie

The President's Report

Council President Pro Tem Jesse Matthews, Bessemer

Policy Committees
The Heartbeat of the League



Each Spring, mayors and councilmembers from rural and urban municipalities convene to shape and update the Alabama League of Municipalities Policies and Goals, while also networking with fellow municipal elected officials and legislators. The Policies and Goals are legislative and policy statements that govern the League. Proposed Policies and Goals are voted on by the membership at the Annual Convention each year. Once the document is adopted, it becomes the revised Policies and Goals that serve as guidance for the upcoming year.

None of this would be possible without the input and leadership of the League's five standing Policy Committees. As someone who has served on and chaired several policy committees for the League, including the Committee on State and Federal Legislation, I have seen first-hand how valuable these committees are to newcomers as well as seasoned municipal officials. There is no more important function of the League than identifying the policies and goals that assist in developing the League's legislative agenda for the Regular Session. As members, it is our duty and responsibility to help strategically guide the League forward during its policy-making decisions. I encourage each of you who are not currently involved with the League, or are looking for introductory ways to interact with League staff and fellow officials, to consider joining one of the League's five Policy Committees.

2019 Policy Committee Dates
League Headquarters, Montgomery

- **FAIR:** Tuesday, March 26
- **EENR:** Tuesday, April 2
- **CED:** Tuesday, April 9
- **TPSC:** Tuesday, April 16
- **HD:** Tuesday, April 23

What are Policy Committees?

The League has five standing policy committees comprised of mayors and councilmembers from each congressional district in the state. The committees convene in the Spring at League headquarters to hear from state and federal resource advisors and to update their policy statements for the League's Policies and Goals document. This important document will be used by the Committee on State and Federal Legislation when it meets to develop the League's Legislative Package for the Regular Session.

What are the five Policy Committees?

Committee on Finance, Administration and Intergovernmental Relations (FAIR). FAIR reviews and develops policy on fiscal matters affecting municipalities, including municipal administration, intergovernmental mandates, personnel policies, liability, public records retention/destruction, workers and unemployment compensation and revenues and finance. The Committee also reviews trends relating to consolidation of jurisdictions and potential threats to the integrity of local government.

Committee on Energy, Environment and Natural Resources (EENR). EENR reviews and develops policy on environmental issues, energy initiatives and quality of life considerations, including water and air quality, solid waste, hazardous/toxic wastes and pollution control. The Committee also reviews Alabama trends relating to hazardous and solid waste disposal and air and water pollution as well as garbage disposal methods, regional disposal areas, incineration, land fill and rodent and vector control.

Committee on Transportation, Public Safety and Communication (TPSC). TPSC reviews and develops policy on transportation programs and their revenue sources and allocations; public works programs, particularly those related to infrastructure development; public and private utilities, including telecommunications; and public safety issues, including crime prevention, law enforcement, fire prevention and protection, emergency medical services, emergency management and response, motor vehicle safety and animal control.

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Rural Resilience:

Surviving and Thriving in a Changed Economy

Joe Sumners, Ph.D. Executive Director
Government & Economic Development Institute, Auburn University

I love rural Alabama. Until I graduated from high school and left for Auburn University in 1975, I lived in the same little house in the rural community of Creswell, which is about two miles from Childersburg on the Shelby County side of the Coosa River. I claim Harpersville as my hometown, because that's where the mail came from. Our address was Route One, Harpersville. I don't think we had a Route Two. Looking from my front yard, I saw acres of Mr. R.J. Green's cotton field. A barbed-wire fence usually kept the cows from wandering into our backyard. For me and my brother, our best friends were our three cousins who lived next door. My granddaddy and grandmother lived two houses down. I can't imagine a better place to grow up.

Origins of the Rural Crisis

Many of the places like where I am from – our small towns and rural communities – face an ongoing crisis. As many rural communities were struggling with long-standing problems of low-quality education and high poverty, they were overwhelmed by the newer forces of globalization and technological change. These changes in the national and regional economies hit our rural areas like a Spring tornado. Farms and factories that once sustained rural communities and economies are gone forever.

Once the hallmark of rural enterprise, the small "family farm" is rapidly disappearing. In 1950, Alabama was home to 220,000 farms. In 2017, there were fewer than 44,000.[1] After college, I spent a couple of years working for the health department in Shelby County where I inspected and collected milk samples from 12 small dairy farms. Today, none of those dairies are in operation. The family farms that once dotted the Alabama countryside have given way to a few large, integrated corporate enterprises. In fact, the typical small farmer now derives a majority of his income away from the farm. The slow death of family farming has had devastating effects on Alabama's rural communities. With the loss of farm income, rural communities witnessed the exodus of grain dealers, gins, restaurants, insurance companies, feed stores, chemical companies, banks, and other businesses that comprised the backbone of their local economies. Gone also were tax revenues that funded rural schools, hospitals, highways, libraries and all the other facets of life critical to a healthy community.

Instead of cotton, corn or soybeans, many rural communities now count high school graduates as their primary export. Rural Alabama has watched many of its brightest young people leave for good, returning only for holidays and family reunions. Left behind are many place-bound people lacking the education and skills sought by employers – high school dropouts, single mothers and older adults.

Many rural economies survived for a time as textile mills and other low-wage, low-skill, non-durable manufacturing plants provided jobs for residents. Workers with a high school education or less could find jobs that allowed them to make a decent living. But the U.S. manufacturing economy that sustained rural economies has seen rapid employment decline due to lower labor costs in other countries and exponential technological change as machines have replaced human labor. The textile and apparel sectors that many rural Alabama communities depended on were among those hit hardest by these changes.

In its sobering 2002 report, "Shadows in the Sunbelt Revisited," the think tank MDC wrote: "National recovery won't bring jobs back to the rural South. Production has moved to other countries with lower wages, or plants have substituted technologically advanced machines for people. Tens of thousands of jobs are not coming back."[2] The report notes a litany of challenges for rural communities, including "isolation by distance, lagging infrastructure, sparse resources that cannot adequately support education and other public services, racial and ethnic divisions, and weak economic competitiveness."[3]

The Alabama Divide

	Metro Counties (over 100K population)	Rural Counties (under 25K population)
Population growth, 2000-2017	+20.1%	-9.9%
Adults age 25 and older with less than HS diploma	13.2%	21.7%
Adults age 25 and older with a college degree or more	28.1%	13.0%
Median Household Income	$48,748	$32,291
Percent below poverty level	16%	24.7%

Source: U.S. Census, Community Survey 2012-2016

Two Alabamas

In 2000, Governor Don Siegelman's Commerce Commission, charged with developing an economic development plan for Alabama, stated in its final report: "Clearly, there are two Alabamas, one urban and one rural. The first is enjoying relative success … The second, for the most part, is making little or no progress, and continues to keep Alabama from being recognized as a serious competitor."

In the 18 years since that report was released, we have witnessed the persistent depopulation of rural Alabama. While Alabama counties with populations over 100,000 have grown by an average of 20 percent since 2000, counties of less than 25,000 saw their population decrease by an average of 10 percent. During this period, 22 of the 26 counties with populations below 25,000 lost population, including Lowndes (-25 percent), Macon (-22 percent), and Perry (-21 percent). At the same time, almost every metro county experienced strong growth, including Baldwin (51 percent), Shelby (49 percent) and Madison (44 percent).[4] As rural communities lose population, they also lose their tax base, workforce and community leadership. Compared to metro areas, rural counties have older populations, higher unemployment, lower median family incomes, a lower percentage of high school graduates and lower average ACT scores. Rural schools and hospitals face an immediate crisis in attracting qualified teachers and healthcare providers. As evidenced in the table to the left, there are still "two Alabamas," and the gap between them continues to widen.

Responding to the Rural Crisis

While the problems of rural areas are obvious, practical solutions are not. How can rural communities attract good jobs without an educated workforce? How can they educate a workforce when schools lack adequate funding? How can communities improve schools without the tax base that economic development would provide?

What is Alabama's current strategy to address this multifaceted rural crisis? There is no apparent strategy. There is no state agency dedicated exclusively to rural interests and no comprehensive approach to identifying and addressing the critical issues facing rural Alabama, which includes over two-thirds of our counties.

Addressing this unprecedented rural crisis will require leadership, commitment and coordination – all of which are currently lacking. While every other Southern state has at least one state-level entity that deals solely with rural concerns and constituencies, Alabama does not.

Absent the creation of a state-level agency for planning and support of rural development, the State should increase

support for programs like Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) and Main Street Alabama. ACE – a non-profit organization with representation from state agencies, universities, the private sector and non-profits – provides community development guidance and assistance in the areas of leadership development and strategic planning to cities with populations between 2,000 and 18,000. Municipalities apply on a competitive basis and are selected for the program based on their capacity for, and commitment to, meeting ACE standards. ACE is currently the state's best model of cooperative effort to address issues of rural community and economic development.

Without strong support and direction from the state government, rural communities know that they are mostly on their own when it comes to developing their local economy. In many struggling rural communities, leaders pin their hopes for economic prosperity on the recruitment of a large manufacturing plant to "save" their town. They are sure that their big break is just around the corner, if only they can come up with the right financial incentives and recruitment strategy.

Recruiting industry, however, is extremely competitive, and many rural communities are at a severe disadvantage compared to their metro area competitors. Today's economy is characterized by free trade, corporations seeking inexpensive labor in other countries and smarter machines replacing humans. We now live in a world where high-quality industries are less interested in cheap labor and low taxes and more interested in a highly educated labor force, modern infrastructure and public amenities that contribute to a high quality of life. In *Area Development* magazine's *2017 Executive Survey*, three of the top four site selection factors cited by corporate executives were: 1) highway accessibility, 3) availability of skilled labor and 4) quality of life. As noted in the MDC "Shadows in the Sunbelt Revisited" report, "Enticing companies from afar to relocate with the bait of cheap land, low taxes, and a surplus of hardworking but undereducated workers – that old recipe no longer works."[5]

To survive, rural communities need diverse economic development strategies that go beyond just business recruitment. However, other key determinants of a strong local economy generally receive much less attention and support – business retention and expansion, small business and entrepreneurial development as well as tourism and retiree attraction, for example.

More significantly, local leaders pay too little attention to building the essential community infrastructure. Stated another way, many small towns overemphasize marketing and sales (industrial recruiting) without adequate attention to product development (improving the quality of the community). However, our experience teaches that prosperous local economies are built upon the foundation of strong communities. And strong communities are committed to bolstering the: 1) *civic infrastructure*, 2) *human infrastructure* and 3) *physical infrastructure* (including broadband communication technologies).

Building Community Infrastructure: Physical, Human, Civic

In 2006, Auburn University hosted the first *Alabama Rural Roundtable* where about 60 key rural stakeholders came together to share ideas about how to promote prosperity in rural Alabama. They identified three priorities for ensuring rural prosperity: 1) leadership and citizen participation, 2) education and workforce development and 3) communications technology (i.e., high-speed Internet). Interestingly, these rural leaders focused less on industrial recruitment strategies than on how to build up the community infrastructure that underpins the local economy. The infrastructure components that they identified represent the: 1) physical infrastructure, 2) human infrastructure and 3) civic infrastructure. In 2017, the Auburn University Government & Economic Development Institute conducted a second *Alabama Rural Roundtable*, where participants affirmed the three rural priorities from 2006, and added a fourth priority – addressing rural healthcare access.

1. Physical Infrastructure

All rural leaders understand the importance of the physical infrastructure. They know roads, water, gas, electricity and sewers are necessary to support economic growth. For many companies and industries, transportation of data, images, voices and sound is at least as important as the transportation of goods by highway, rail and air. Communities without access to high-speed Internet cannot compete in the knowledge economy. The weakness of the physical infrastructure is a huge challenge for Alabama rural economic development, especially the lack of high-speed internet and an inadequate transportation infrastructure.

2. Human Infrastructure

The number one issue in economic development today is workforce quality. In the 21st century knowledge economy, outstanding education – pre-K, K-12 and post-secondary – is essential for successful economic development. States and communities that fail to produce and attract educated and skilled workers are at a huge disadvantage in the competitive world of economic development, which is increasingly shifting from an emphasis on recruiting industry to recruiting talent. The highest priorities for rural economic development must include maintaining excellent schools and strengthening the local workforce training system, with active collaboration among business leaders and K-12 and community college stakeholders.

3. Civic Infrastructure

Successful communities all over the United States understand the importance of an expansive view of community leadership. The traditional notion of the community leader – often a mayor or other powerful "position-holder" – as chief community problem-solver has given way to a new, more dynamic model of the community leader as catalyst, connector and consensus-builder. Dr. David Mathews, President and CEO of the Kettering Foundation, in summarizing the findings of the Foundation's research on community politics, writes:

> "What stands out in the high-achieving community is not so much the characteristics of the leaders as their number … The high-achieving community had ten times more people providing leadership than communities of comparable size … And its leaders function not as gatekeepers but as door openers, bent on widening participation."[6]

A community with a strong civic infrastructure has many diverse leaders. It mobilizes the knowledge, talents and perspectives of every segment of the community and builds strong connections and partnerships among community stakeholders. However, in my 30 years of working in Alabama communities, one of the most common deficiencies I find is disconnectedness. Most communities have many excellent people, programs and projects. All communities have at least some institutional assets – city government, churches, schools, civic clubs and Chambers of Commerce. But far too often, individuals and organizations work independently rather than in concert with one another. There is a critical need to connect fragmented community assets and initiatives and to engage key stakeholders and citizens in working together to address community concerns.

Rural Healthcare

Healthcare is a huge component of the Alabama economy, and impacts rural economic development (jobs, tax revenues, local spending) in many ways. Rural areas cannot be successful in recruiting businesses and industries without the incentive of adequate quality healthcare. However, Alabama's rural hospitals and other healthcare facilities face crisis conditions due to inadequate funding and inequities in hospital/physician reimbursement policies at the federal and state levels. Attracting and keeping medical practitioners in rural areas is a huge challenge that must be addressed if rural residents are to have adequate healthcare access and coverage. Specifically, Alabama needs increased support for education programs that specialize in placing medical practitioners in rural communities. We also need incentives, such as paying off school loans in return for years of service, to recruit qualified healthcare professionals – doctors, dentists, physician's assistants, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, etc. – into rural areas. Telemedicine can also be an important tool for improving healthcare access in rural areas; however, many rural areas still lack adequate broadband coverage to effectively support it.

Strategic Planning

Regions and communities throughout rural Alabama need effective strategic planning. An era of rapid social, cultural and technological change requires that rural communities take a proactive approach to addressing current and future problems. High-achieving communities engage in a strategic planning process to identify what makes their place special and to decide how to cultivate and promote their unique assets – such as a river, a lake, a mountain or a unique history. Every rural community has unique assets. Some places have opportunities for tourism, some for retail, some for agriculture, some for entrepreneurship and some for industry. Each community must develop a creative plan that matches its assets with opportunities.

Every rural strategic plan should include innovative strategies for improving "quality of place." Strong communities are characterized by excellent schools, quality healthcare, attractive downtowns and neighborhoods as well as good shopping and amenities. Of course, many small towns face huge challenges in achieving these goals – there is a tremendous gap between "where they are" and "where they need to be." Strategic planning helps communities to identify and align all available resources to make measurable improvement toward these collective goals. There is no "magic bullet" or easy path to success. The key is a long-term commitment to continuous improvement. The strategic plan becomes a road map and a benchmark for community progress.

Of course, the creation of a strategic plan should not be the end of the process. If so, it would resemble many unsuccessful community planning efforts that result in a plan that looks good on paper but ends up collecting dust on a shelf. To prevent this, the community should create an entity – a Prosperity Alliance – that is responsible for ensuring that the major objectives in the plan are actually implemented. It should include representatives from government, business, education and faith-based institutions. It should meet regularly to monitor the community's progress on the plan and make needed modifications to ensure that the plan remains relevant to community priorities and needs. This group can serve as an important community "crossroad" where key community stakeholders have the opportunity to think, work and act together to accomplish shared community objectives.

Regionalism

Leaders in our small towns and rural areas must also begin to think more regionally. Because rural municipalities

continued on page 47

Thomasville, AL

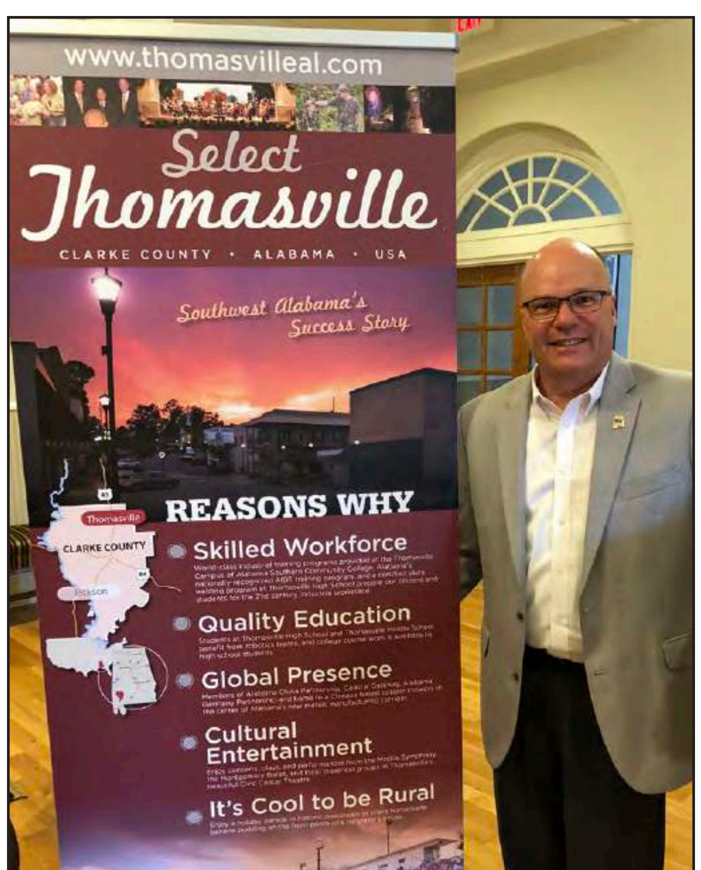
A Regional Model for Rural Success

By Carrie A. Banks • Communications Director • ALM

Editor's note: The Alabama League of Municipalities launched Live Locally Alabama in January 2018 – a grassroots campaign to encourage civic engagement, instill community pride and highlight the crucial role municipal government plays in the daily lives of Alabama's citizens. As part of this campaign, we will include a Live Locally Alabama feature in each issue of the Journal *highlighting important community topics and quality of life issues that will help municipal officials and employees improve their cities and towns for the people they serve. For additional information on this campaign, visit livelocallyalabama.org.*

Located 100 miles from the nearest urban center in one of Alabama's poorest regions, Thomasville is shifting the narrative for a multi-county area within the Black Belt through collaboration, forward-thinking and steadfastly refusing to accept the status quo.

"We've always tried to create a mindset that it's cool to be rural," said longtime Thomasville Mayor Sheldon Day. "What do people in big cities do on the weekends? They want to get out of the city. So why not now, especially with technology, *live* in a rural area and go to a big city when you absolutely have to? In less than two hours you can be anywhere, but you can *live* in a low crime area with good schools and the arts – a well-rounded community."



Thomasville Mayor Sheldon Day

With a population approaching 5,000, this Clarke County municipality absolutely believes in itself – and has been actively building on its inherent resources for the past two decades, effectively generating quality of life services and experiences that resonate well beyond its city limits.

And it all started with Mississippi …

Learn from successful models – and keep learning.

"When I got in office in 1996, I asked everybody where's the best model for rural development," said Day, who is a Thomasville native. "And everybody told me Tupelo, Mississippi. I went and spent three days at the Community Development Foundation (CDF) in Tupelo, met Vaughn Grisham and we began a relationship that involved brainstorming about what we could do here in Thomasville."

Day's experience in Tupelo and his relationship with Dr. Grisham, emeritus director of the McLean Institute at the University of Mississippi where he has taught for the past 40+ years as well as authored several books, proved to be invaluable. Dr. Grisham has helped establish leadership programs in more than 300 counties and has done community development work in more than 30 states. His research focuses on studying small, poor communities that have transformed themselves into the best economic models in the country. His community development leadership training explores how these ordinary communities have achieved extraordinary results. In his 1999 case study, *Hand in Hand: Community and Economic Development in Tupelo*, he identifies several guiding principles:

- Local people must address local problems.
- Each person should be treated as a resource. So the community development process begins with the development of people.

continued on page 14

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Municipal Overview

By Ken Smith, Executive Director

Bridging the Urban/Rural Divide

The face of America is changing. Census figures show a dramatic increase in the percentage of Americans living in urban areas. According to 1910 census figures, more than half of the American population (54.4 percent) lived in areas defined as rural. In 2010, the most recent federal decennial census, less than 20 percent (19.3 percent) of the population now lives in rural areas. The Census Bureau identifies two types of urban areas:

- Urbanized Areas (UAs) of 50,000 or more people;
- Urban Clusters (UCs) of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people.

All other population areas are defined as rural. Using this definition, rural areas are those with populations below 2,500.

The 2010 census reveals that the situation in Alabama mirrors that of the nation. Roughly 60 percent of Alabama's citizens now reside in areas defined as urban. This changing landscape creates circumstances that are ripe for discussion and potential division. The Alabama League of Municipalities prides itself on providing all incorporated municipalities in the state with opportunities to work together to find a single, unified message. At the same time, we can't ignore differences between our members. As we work to define our common voice, we must recognize that while there are similar concerns, the importance and impact of even similar issues will likely affect differently-sized municipalities in different ways. And, the potential solutions to those issues and concerns will often vary based on population and budget.

Of course, when presented with any statistic, it is important to look behind the numbers. While there are statistical differences between rural and urban areas, the benefits of rural living should not be overlooked. Recently, the National League of Cities issued a report called "Bridging the Urban-Rural Economic Divide." This report states that the evidence is clear that "Economic change and recovery in our nation have resulted in vastly different opportunities and outcomes for individuals and families based on where they live." Growth in urban areas has not, according to the views of many, resulted in similar growth in rural areas.

The report notes, though, that this view ignores the realities of the benefits available in our rural communities and leads to further divisions between urban and rural areas. The author, Christy McFarland, states that, "It's time for the narrative to shift from urban vs. rural to a shared economic future. Bridging the economic divide between urban and rural areas will require states, regions and localities to understand and bolster *the relationship between urban and rural areas* in economically meaningful and strategic ways." Some facts from the report show that:

- In all states, urban areas outpace their rural counterparts in broadband access. States with overall higher levels of broadband access also have more significant urban-rural digital divides, underscoring the importance of extending affordable broadband to rural areas. Overall, rural communities have 37% more residents without broadband access, as compared to their urban counterparts. Like all other states, Alabama is listed as having higher urban than rural access to broadband. "Broadband access tends to cluster in urban areas because it is a guaranteed market for private providers, unlike less densely populated rural areas." The key, of course, will be in finding steps necessary to bridge that gap.
- States with strong levels of educational attainment have less conspicuous educational divides between urban and rural areas. Often, rural areas are home to universities, which connect rural residents to educational opportunities and narrow the gap. The lack of broadband access in rural areas is cited as a contributing factor to the educational divide. Another key issue for states with more significant urban-rural education divides is rural talent attraction and retention as talented young people move elsewhere to find work. Alabama is listed as having much more educational attainment levels in urban areas.
- Although urban areas have somewhat stronger rates of high-value business growth (growth of establishments in exporting industry sectors), rural areas don't appear disadvantaged in this characteristic. In fact, many rural areas outpace their urban counterparts in creating high-value businesses. Urban areas only had 3% greater growth in traded sector establishments than rural areas. Alabama is listed as having much stronger rural business growth.
- Most states do not have significant urban-rural divides in prosperity growth, defined as their per capita contributions

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- The goal of community development is to help people help themselves.
- Meet the needs of the whole community by starting with its poorest members, not just as targets for top-down efforts but as full partners in helping design those efforts.
- Leadership is a prime ingredient, but community development cannot be achieved without organizations and structure.
- Community development must be done both locally and regionally if the full benefits are to be achieved.
- Never turn the community development process over to any agency that does not involve the people of the community.
- Expenditures for community development are an investment – not a subsidy – and will return gains to the investors. So people with money have both the responsibility and an interest in investing in the development of their own community.

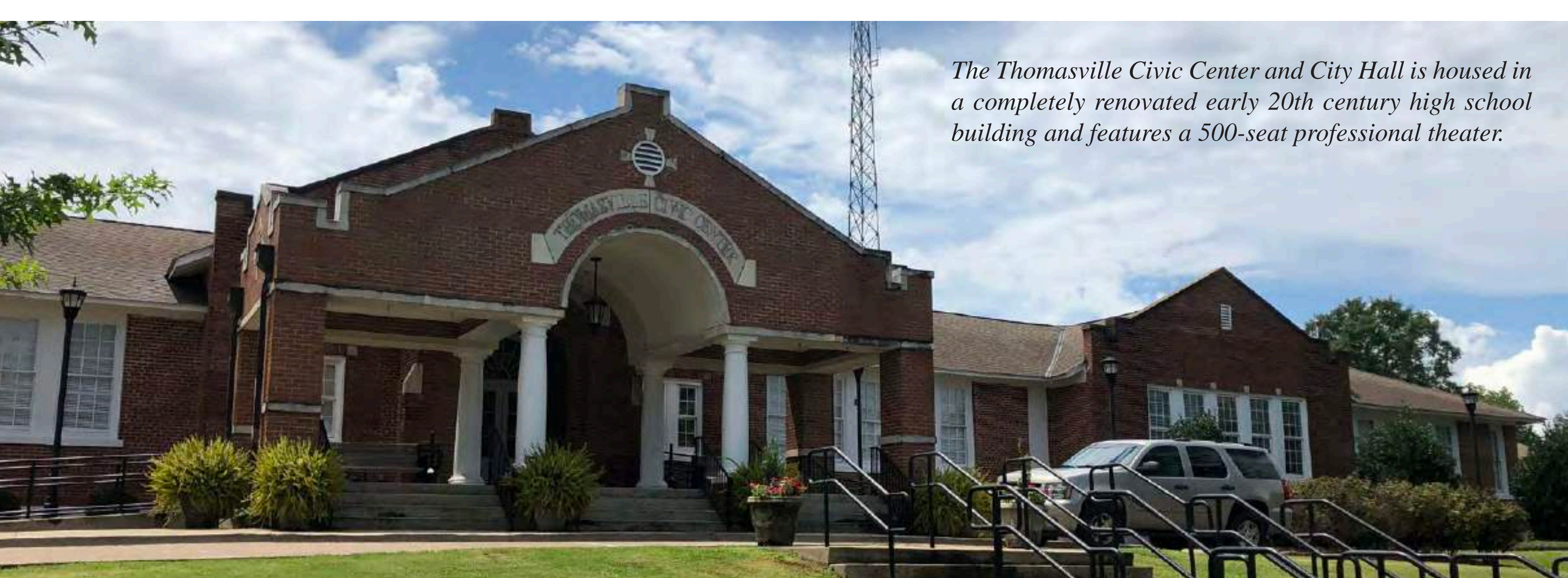
"I looked at what they were doing in Tupelo at that time," Day said. "They'd built this new job training center, which was a collaborative effort between the city schools and the community college, where they were basically sending high school students to get college credit and to prepare them for the workforce right out of high school or very quickly out of high school because they had such a need for additional workforce. I brought that idea back. Our high school and the college are a tenth of a mile apart – they're neighbors – so we collaborated with the K-12 system and the two-year college system, trying to get everybody to work together and do more. We started with welding and then went into pre-nursing then pre-engineering and now we have IT and we're doing all types of course work and collaborative efforts between the high school and the college. In the past 11 years, we've graduated 200 welders out of our high school – we have an actual college-based instructor at our high school five days a week teaching welding and college courses on our high school campus. We were one of the first high schools in the state to offer legitimate dual enrollment."

Success is built on relationships and identifying resources. And saying 'thank you'.

"I have a saying – the only way to get back on your feet is to get off your fanny," Day said. "And it's true. We can't sit here and wait for the state to fix our problems or wait for the federal government to fix our problems because what we'd be waiting on is 'well, when we get that grant, we can do this or when they come down here to help us we'll start moving forward.' The key to success in rural Alabama is about relationships, working together and *not* accepting the status quo."

To that end, Day began cultivating resources through active participation in statewide programs such as the Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE), which helps communities ranging in populations from 2,000 to 18,000 to identify and maximize their attributes to strengthen long-term economic success, and by developing relationships from the Governor's office to the State House to Alabama's Congressional Delegation.

"I think every community that's eligible should go through the ACE program," Day said. "However, don't just go through it and stick it on the shelf. I think rural communities, for the most part, have been beat down psychologically. We've found this in the Black Belt. They continue to lower the expectation for their community in the hopes that they get *something* done. In Thomasville, we're working on dozens of projects – it's like fishing. The only way to catch fish is to keep fishing. Some days they're biting



The Thomasville Civic Center and City Hall is housed in a completely renovated early 20th century high school building and features a 500-seat professional theater.

The Thomasville Civic Center's 500-seat theater, which features community theater productions and music concerts, is a huge draw, not only for local residents but for the surrounding counties.

and some days they're not. But when they're not biting you can't just close up and go home. I felt like a bumper car when I first got in office. I started looking at where we were and what was our purpose and where we were going – what was our vision. And Sen. (Richard) Shelby actually gave me some advice – he said I'll help you, but I want to know what everybody else is doing – I want to see your plan. The way you garner respect and increase their interest in helping you with projects is you've got to show them you're willing to do what it takes to make the project a success – to make something happen successfully. Once you get one project done and they buy in, the next time you ask for help, you've built the reputation for getting things done and it's a little easier. Also, I don't ask for something every time. Instead I go and say thank you. That's one of the keys. I put those who help us in the forefront. I tell people we wouldn't have been able to get the project done with the help of Sen. Shelby or the Governor or whoever was involved. We've got people who will storm to the wall for us because they know we're working nonstop. When I start a big project, I understand it's going to take me three years just to get the plans done, figure out how we're going to fund it and how we're going to get those pieces in place – that's when I can start taking it to others for help and to begin stacking grant sources to provide some of the funding."

It starts with *community*.

"You have to have a vision," Day said. "You really have to look at your assets. Community involvement is a key piece. To really be successful, in order to get grant money or to get people from the state and federal government to really notice what you're doing, you've got to actually be *doing* something! You've got to try to do it and then you can prove to them you're serious and you can show them – here's my gap; here's where I need your help. Thomasville has been successful in *doing*. If we had waited for the state to renovate our Civic Center, we'd have never gotten any help. Instead, we formed an Arts Council and started working towards a solid plan."

And from there, something truly incredible happened – the city was able to purchase and renovate an early 20th Century high school building into a beautifully transformed space that houses not only City Hall but a very active Civic Center with a 500-seat theater and professional stage where community theater performances and music concerts are held throughout the year to sold-out audiences.

"When we first started dreaming of having this facility, I knew the only way the community was going to buy into it was if we *showed* the community we had a need for a theater," Day said. "So, the Arts Council started producing shows and doing things at the high school, which has a cafetorium – basically a cafeteria with a stage at the end of it – and folks begin to understand we really needed a theater. We got people engaged from the very beginning; then we passed a lodgings tax and an increase in our business license fees to fund our facility. We did not have one person come out in opposition. We created the dream, showed them what it was going to look like and now we have this incredible facility."

The theater has been a hub not only for Thomasville residents but for the surrounding counties. Karen Dean, who was born and raised in Thomasville and whose mother was the city's librarian, returned "home" to be closer to her family after graduating from the Alabama School of Fine Arts and then college. She is the Civic Center Director as well as the Artistic Director for the Arts Council. "When we started, we thought we'd have a little community theater group and

The Thomasville Public Library offers a career-readiness program to help job seekers with resumes, applications and computer access. This program, which served more than 50,000 visitors from throughout the region last year, has been so successful that plans are underway to relocate the library to a significantly larger facility in Thomasville's historic downtown.

maybe in 20 years we'd have a theater," she said. "It took us five. We usually have eight to 11 counties involved in each production. The Arts Council has reached out to Camden and Sweet Water and other communities to collaborate. We have been blessed. Big dreams can grow in small places."

The theater has now been active for nearly 14 years and is about to produce its 16th show. The Arts Council has also started an honor band program for the surrounding area with participants from eight counties and high schools.

According to Mayor Day, well over 1,000 folks attend each theater production because they're held for three or four nights. "Our draw area is huge because we are pretty much 100 miles from anybody," he said. "We've kind of become the epicenter. We work closely with the folks in Monroeville as well as Demopolis and other cities; we're not trying to just do our own thing. We're collaborating with other communities – which is what we're supposed to do. We've had the Mobile Symphony here numerous times. We've had the Montgomery Ballet do "The Nutcracker". We also have an art room where we teach painting and other art classes. We've got culture in the country!"

In addition to theater productions, concerts and art programs, Thomasville has made a concerted effort to develop a ready workforce, beginning with what started out as a career-readiness help desk in the Thomasville Public Library and has now become an invaluable resource for job seekers and those needing help with applications or access to a computer, WiFi and a printer. Library staff also provide guidance on creating resumes, filling out job applications and finding continuing education opportunities. This program, which served more than 50,000 visitors last year, has been so popular the City plans to relocate the library into a larger, two-story building within its historic downtown – a move that will quadruple the library's existing space and allow the creation of a dedicated career-readiness department with more than 30 computers.

"Thomasville is kind of an island to itself prosperity wise in the Black Belt but we realize so goes Thomasville, so goes the Black Belt – our economy is based on all those people who come from the Black Belt to shop here and do business here so it's our duty and, in my opinion, our obligation to be a partner with those folks to do all we can to help Wilcox, Marengo and the surrounding counties," Day said.

In the past 12 years, Thomasville has grown from one industrial park to five with more than $700 million in capital investment and 1,000 new jobs and is on the cusp of an additional $200 million investment and 300 jobs. Day understands that while Thomasville is a city of 5,000, the entire trade area is more than 70,000; therefore, identifying and showcasing the strengths of the region means collaborating with numerous stakeholders and thinking beyond one's own borders.

"We've done that with the arts; we've done that with job creation," he said. "We recruited Golden Dragon (a modern copper tubing application center with the capacity to produce more than 100 million pounds of copper per year). It's in Wilcox County. Five years ago, before Golden Dragon started production, Wilcox County was at 28.8 percent unemployment; today they're at 8.6. That's still more than twice the national

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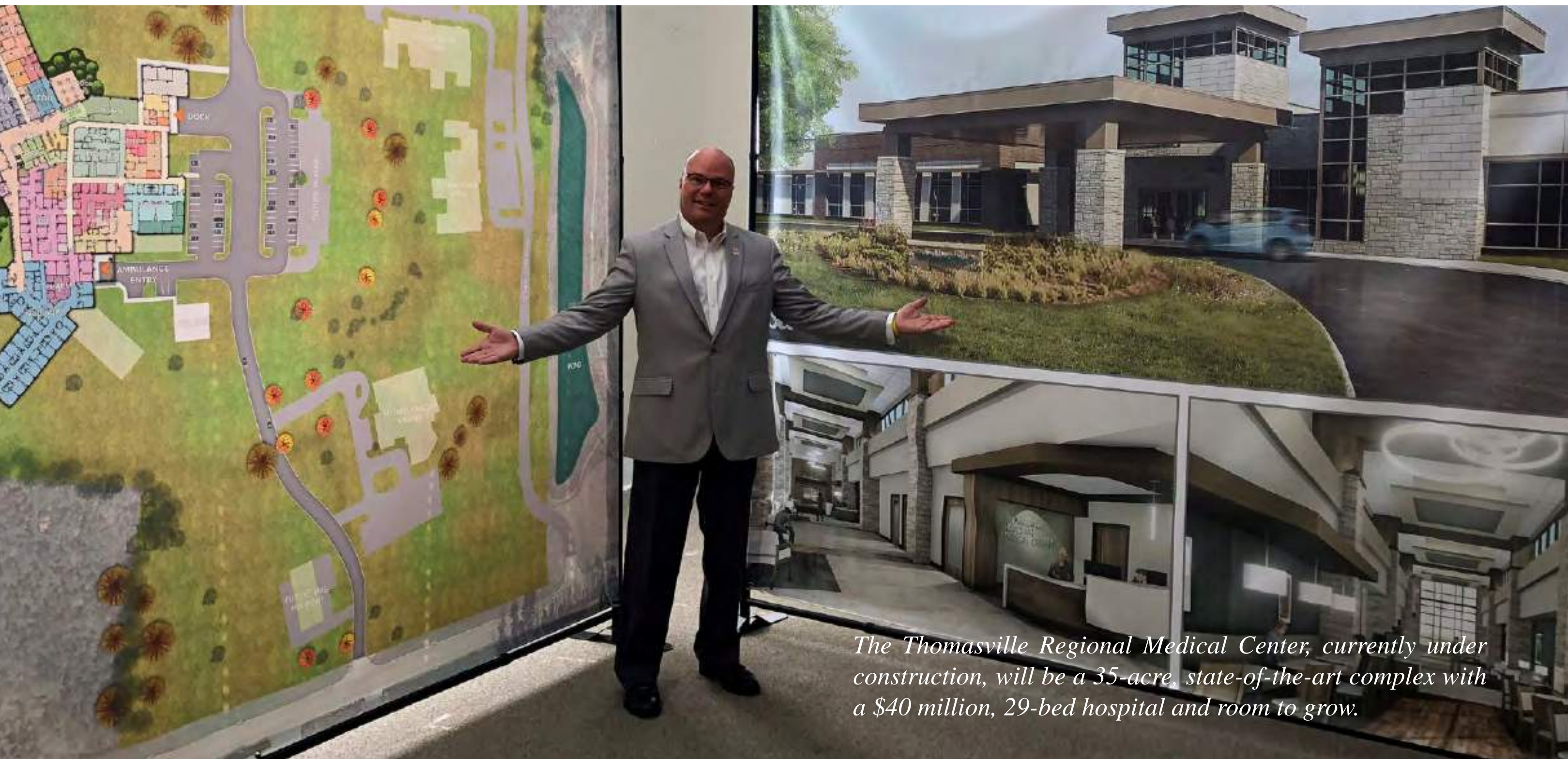

The Thomasville Regional Medical Center, currently under construction, will be a 35-acre, state-of-the-art complex with a $40 million, 29-bed hospital and room to grow.

#Rural2pt0 and Digital Parity: How can Municipalities Help?

By Roberto Gallardo, Ph.D. • Purdue Extension Community & Regional Economics Specialist

Imagine the following scenario: *Most work can be done from anywhere. Robots will produce the majority of goods, including agricultural related products. Local, state and national economies will be monitored in real-time, anticipating recessions and taking the necessary steps.*

Telehealth will allow remote personalized care, minor robot-based surgeries at home and even drone ambulances will show up anticipating health issues based on your DNA, real-time health indicators and medical history. Healthcare overall will become proactive and not reactive in nature.

Most services will be available online, including voting. Government transparency, accountability and responsiveness will be at a much higher level, relying in part on blockchain. Civic engagement and public discourse, augmented by digital platforms, will be much more effective and efficient and not limited to local politics.

Travel will be done quickly and effortlessly thanks to driverless cars. Self-driving trucks along with drones will deliver fresh food, medicines and key components of things you can 3-D print in your home within hours if not minutes. The era of mass manufacturing will be long gone.

Lastly, mixed reality will allow you to attend meetings, complete online badges, certificates or degrees and experience cultural and entertainment events. You will, however, still experience nature, attend parties, some medical treatments and social gatherings mostly in-person.

Given this scenario, where would you live?

While the above scenario may sound too far-fetched, I believe it is possible and, if it plays out, will result in a rural renaissance or #Rural2pt0. I suspect this scenario will be mostly a reality within 30 years.

You see, the digital age and its applications have the potential to eliminate density and geographic proximity requirements that were so critical during the industrial age. It is possible then, in the digital age, for a rural community to maintain its "rural" feel and continue to leverage its natural amenities while taking advantage of what only dense urban areas enjoyed last century. Things like access to funding (crowdfunding), worldwide markets (e-commerce), savvy employees (teleworkers) and real-time information; collaboration and innovation (videoconferencing and soon mixed reality); certain levels of healthcare (telehealth); and educational opportunities (massive open online courses, online certifications).

So, what is in our way to achieve #Rural2pt0?

For starters, ubiquitous ultra-fast internet connectivity. Just like electricity, internet connectivity needs to be everywhere. Data limits need to go. We have a long way to go before reaching parity regarding broadband infrastructure between urban and rural.

Another barrier to #Rural2pt0 is digital skills. The vast majority of digital savvy workers are located in urban areas. Investments to improve digital skills in rural areas are lacking or very inadequate. This needs to change. A digitally literate rural society is a must.

Lastly and the most serious challenge, is that the traditional 20th century mindset still exists in most rural communities. A change in mindset that better understands the implications of the digital age is a key ingredient for #Rural2pt0. This change in mindset can take place through increasing awareness, be it through spreading the word, education, presentations and/or formal or informal conversations helping rural communities transition to, plan for and prosper in the digital age.

I know, I know. You are thinking I have lost my mind. Enrico Moretti's influential work "The New Geography of Jobs" found exactly the opposite: that high-tech jobs do, indeed, band together in specific areas, just like industrial jobs. The Brookings Institution also found that urban areas are generating the vast majority of jobs in the U.S and, on top of all this, the United Nations projects that by 2050, 66 percent of the world population will be urban, up from 54 percent in 2014.

My counter arguments? Digital parity is not yet a reality and so the true decentralization effect remains to be felt. I believe the trends discussed above – towards more, not less urbanization – are dovetailing industrial age trends but as digital parity sinks in, these will slow down or even reverse. In addition, as older generations pass, younger digital native generations are more likely to embrace, leverage and demand more digital interactions, making the scenario described above, which requires a high digital comfort level, possible.

The Role of Local Governments

Local government, municipal and county, can and should play a critical role towards digital equality and a rural renaissance. What exactly can local government do regarding digital parity – infrastructure, skills and mindset? While each community is different, local government, along with businesses and civil society, are key community pillars that, when in synergy, can do much for any community.

Local governments are instrumental regarding the broadband infrastructure parity objective. No, I do not mean municipalities building and offering broadband as a utility, though that is certainly a possibility, but rather ensuring this issue becomes a community priority. Once this issue is labeled a priority, local government leadership can bring all interested parties together to begin meaningful conversations that can result in feasible strategies.

Once recognized as a priority, municipalities and counties can more easily provide available resources towards these strategies. For example, making it easy to lease water towers and other government assets that can help reduce the cost and make it easier on the providers or cooperatives involved. Another effort includes drafting and adopting a "dig once" policy to ensure municipal departments talk to providers when working on water, sewer or street repairs. One more effort could involve streamlining right-of-way costs within the local government's authority and working with state agencies to do the same. Finally, local government can draft and implement, in partnership with providers, a campaign on the benefits of broadband to inform community residents why this investment is needed.

On the digital skills front, local government again can serve as facilitators and support initiatives from school districts, nonprofits and other community anchor institutions to ensure digital skills are improved in the community. Not only do children require these digital skills, but also adults through workforce development efforts. Moreover, local government leadership can advocate imparting digital skills on local businesses to help them compete in this global digital economy. Local governments can be strong supporters of these initiatives and provide resources when feasible as well as support the required ecosystem for these skills to flourish. Directly related to local government is ensuring its employees are digital savvy as well.

But perhaps where local government can have a more direct impact on the digital parity issue is on playing its part to change the mindset. Visionary leaders are not only key to begin changing this mindset but, more importantly, ensure government practices what it preaches. For example, local government should engage digitally with its residents, offer more of its services online and leverage digital platforms to increase transparency and responsiveness. If feasible, it can implement smart city strategies to improve city services and reduce costs. More importantly, if local government changes its mindset and supports it with actions, like the ones just discussed, the other two community pillars may follow suit. Alternatively, in case the other two community pillars are already thinking and acting digitally, seeing local government join the bandwagon reinforces and strengthens a community-wide mindset change.

So yes, most digital applications today revolve around urban needs and living. But what if rural were at parity with urban regarding connectivity, digital skills and embracing a digital mindset? Would we see more applications revolving around rural needs and living? In this sense, the scenario described at the beginning of this article is more likely. I truly believe that when this digital parity is reached, the beginning stages of #Rural2pt0 will become obvious. And of course, local government plays an essential role.

Join the #Rural2pt0 movement and contribute your part to make sure digital parity (connectivity, skills and mindset) is a reality sooner rather than later. Propose, discuss, listen, act and join the conversation using this hashtag. Few times in history are you not only capable of seeing what is possible but have the tools to actually forge your destiny. Let's not waste our chance for a #Rural2pt0. ■

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Rural Tourism:

It's a Good Time to be a Small Town

Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association

Tourism is everyone's business in Alabama. Some 26.6 million travelers are estimated to have spent more than $14.3 billion in the state in 2017 – an increase of 7.1 percent as compared to 2016 spending. The tourism industry also provides more than 186,000 jobs – 9.4 percent of non-agricultural employment in Alabama – and travelers are shown to have pumped $879 million in state and local taxes into community coffers. And, while tourism is everyone's business in Alabama, it is of greater importance to the rural areas of the state.

"Travelers are moving away from chain restaurants, accommodations and attractions," said Tami Reist, President/CEO of the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association (AMLA). "They want to connect to the heritage and lifestyles of local people, taste the local foods, visit nature's wonders and experience unique hometown attractions. This is evident in the growth of geotourism, agritourism, themed trails and heritage tourism."

AMLA was formed in 1964 with the express purpose of developing North Alabama's travel industry and marketing the region to the traveling public. The organization serves the 16 northern-most counties of the state – five of which have populations of less than 33,000, and three with a total population ranging from 52,000 to 57,000. In fact, you would have to add the total population of 14 of north Alabama's counties together to make up the most-populated county in the state – Jefferson County (659,521).

Reist said tourism offers many advantages to rural communities: "Rural tourism is built around existing assets, such as waterfalls, rivers, historic sites or famous people. Because of this, it places less of a cost-burden on local economies than building entirely new industries and it usually doesn't depend on financial support from outside the community to develop. Tourism also provides an influx of new income to existing local businesses whose focus is not directly related to tourism, such as convenience stores, gift shops, gas stations or grocery stores. Additionally, tourism is a sustainable business that can provide a year-round flow of income into a community."

In North Alabama, the five least populated counties are Lawrence (33,244), Franklin (31,628), Marion (29,998), Cherokee (25,725) and Winston (23,805). According to the latest study by the Alabama Tourism Department, tourism spending and tourist-related employment had a positive effect on each county this past year: Lawrence County 160 jobs and $12,258,796 in travel-related expenditures; Franklin County 273 jobs and $20,289,379 in travel-related expenditures; Marion County 456 jobs and $41,552,651 in travel-related expenditures, Cherokee County 180 jobs and $20,518,980 in travel-related expenditures; and Winston County 169 jobs and $12,558,573 in travel-related expenditures.

One example of a successful tourism development project in a rural area is the famous Jesse Owens Memorial Park in Oakville.

Dream to Reality
(from jesseowensmemorialpark.com)

Three small markers were all that honored Jesse Owens in Oakville, Alabama, the Olympic champion's birthplace. In 1983, the Lawrence County Commission voted not to put a monument on the courthouse square to the dismay of many Lawrence County residents. However, this vote by the Lawrence County Commission only served to ignite passion in the hearts of those who wanted an appropriate tribute for this Olympic great. It would be years before this tribute became a reality.

In 1991, Therman White, an Oakville resident, visited the Lawrence County office of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System in Moulton to discuss the development of a park to honor Jesse Owens. This is when White met James

Pinion, County Agent Coordinator. White had procured land across the street from where the current markers were located. However, at the time the land was nothing more than a cow pasture. With land in hand, White now needed additional funds to build a park. The match of White and Pinion was dynamic. The two, working through Auburn University, raised more than $2 million for the development and construction of the park.

Dr. Tom Chestnut, Auburn University Tourism Specialist, designed the park's development plan, and the park was underway. From 1991 to 1994 fundraising was slow. Then Pinion decided to petition the Olympic Torch Committee to reroute the Olympic torch through the park to the Olympic games in Atlanta. When the committee agreed, funds began to pour in, and the race was on to finish the park. The Jesse Owens Memorial Park was completed just a few days before the arrival of the Olympic torch. The park was dedicated June 29, 1996.

On October 28, 2005, Hampton Inn Corporation's Save-A-Landmark Program furnished volunteers from the company and a check for over $38,000 to revitalize the Jesse Owens Memorial Park. Twenty-five volunteers from north Alabama Hampton Hotels worked together with local contractors to paint, clean and complete extensive landscaping, giving the park a new complexion. This was the 25th roadside attraction refurbished by Hampton's "Save-A-Landmark" program. Hampton has provided more than $1.5 million for restoration of America's roadside treasures since its inception in 2000.

To further boost the awareness of the park, a portion of State Highway 36 in Lawrence County was dedicated in honor of Olympian Jesse Owens in June 2016. According to park officials, the signage led to a dramatic increase in attendance and worldwide interest in Jesse Owens. Attendance nearly tripled from 32,500 in 2015 to 93,468 in 2016. Along with recording visitors from 49 states and the District of Columbia, the park enjoyed visitors from 13 foreign countries with international visitors jumping from 2,925 in 2015 to 5,569 in 2016.

The section of the highway renamed Jesse Owens Parkway includes a portion of Highway 36 beginning at I-65 Exit 328 and ending at the Lawrence County line, just west of Danville. The Alabama Department of Transportation installed six signs – a sign on both the north- and south-bound lanes of Interstate 65 near the Jesse Owens Parkway (Alabama Highway 36) and signs in each direction marking the section of the Alabama Highway 36 named in his honor. Two signs were also replaced on Alabama Highway 157.

"The Board of Directors for the Jesse Owens Museum greatly appreciates the dedication in honor of Jesse Owens," said Nancy Pinion, co-director of the Jesse Owens Museum. "We would like to thank NARCOG, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association, Senator Paul Bussman, Senator Arthur Orr and the City of Hartselle for recognizing the dedication and providing funds for the signage."

On hand for the dedication were ARC Federal Co-Chair Earl F. Gohl, then Governor's ARC Representative Jim Byard, Jr., ARC State Program Manager Al Jones, representatives of state and local government including then Senator Paul Bussman, regional and local tourism officials and family members of Jesse Owens.

Other examples of rural tourism development projects in North Alabama include the new Cherokee Canoe and Kayak Trail in Colbert County; the 89-mile Noah Bike Trail is Limestone County; the expansion of Cherokee Rock Village near Leesburgh to 250-acres; Pond Spring – the General Joe Wheeler Home in Hillsboro renovated by the Alabama Historic Commission; and 1818 Farms in Mooresville which offers farm tours and school field trips. For a complete list of rural travel destinations in North Alabama, visit the new AMLA website at NorthAlabama.org. ▪

Jesse Owens Parkway Dedication, pictured left to right: Tami Reist, President/CEO, Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association; Nancy Pinion, Managing Director, Jesse Owens Museum; Gloria Owens Hemphill, Jesse Owen's daughter; Jim Byard, consultant and former ADECA Director; and Robby Cantrell, NARCOG.

Alabama's Small and Rural Towns: Resources that leverage economic potential to grow communities and enhance character

Nisa Miranda, Director, UA Center for Economic Development

The State of Alabama has been incredibly successful in attracting major manufacturing and technology investments, but if you look at the Forbes or CNBC list of the top states for business, Alabama is number 41 out of 50. Why are other states ranked higher? Better educational system, larger and better skilled workforce, better access to healthcare, better infrastructure. Most of their strength comes from a larger population base, which results in a larger economy and bigger tax revenues, which in turn enables support for – you guessed it – accessible healthcare, better schools and better infrastructure.

However, there is one area where Alabama can go head to head with anyone in the country: quality of life in our small and rural municipalities. Many of our towns still have work to do to create a vibrant downtown, available quality housing and civic and recreational amenities; however, with planning, tenacity and a cohesive team, all of this is in reach.

What are Americans looking for when they are searching for a community where they can start a business, raise their family, retire or enjoy the outdoors?

There are several national organizations that track and rank quality communities. Some of the more popular ones include: areavibes.com, homesnacks.com, livability.com, niche.com, purewow.com and popular magazines such as *Country Living* and *Southern Living* and investment magazines like *Forbes* and *Kiplinger*. If you visit these sites and search for southern towns, you'll find a very long list: Aiken, SC; Bardstown, KY; Beaufort, SC; Bay St Louis, MS; Blowing Rock, NC; Blue Ridge, GA; Fairhope and Florence, AL; Georgetown, TX; Greenwood, MS; Eufaula and Guntersville, AL; Natchez, MS; Natchitoches, LA; Vinings, GA; and many more.

What do these communities have in common? Many have historic and active downtowns. Many have historic neighborhoods with historic houses available as residences or for business. Nearly all are surrounded by nature. They are seaside or lakeside, they are in the foothills or in the mountains. They have outdoor recreational amenities such as cycling and walking trails; creeks, rivers and lakes for water sports.

Not all of these communities have stellar schools or a large number of high paying jobs but they all have diligently focused on improving their communities so that they are unique and a wonderful place to live. They are successful because they have collaborative leadership; a vision and long-term plan for their community; and they build community teams around their projects and initiatives.

Resources for Growing and Enhancing Your Community

Every small and rural Alabama town can aspire to enhance and grow their communities – and there are many resources available specifically for that purpose. State and Federal Agencies and organizations such as Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA), Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA), Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH), Alabama Historical Commission (AHC) and USDA—Rural Development provide expertise and potential funding for a variety of projects. Technical assistance is also available from the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Alabama Regional Development Commissions, Alabama Rural Conservation & Development Councils and Alabama's universities and community colleges.

Many communities rely on the Alabama Regional Planning and Development Councils (www.alarc.org) for grants writing and grants management. The Councils/Commissions are well versed on federal and state funding and have developed deep expertise in these resources.

An often-overlooked resource are the Resource Conservation and Development Councils (www.alabamarcd.org). This group supports local projects that have a natural resources component, and their funds can be used to support federal and state projects such as walking trails, parks, educational programming, marketing and many creative initiatives.

Community colleges throughout the state are deeply involved in workforce development, frequently working directly with local industries to identify specific job training needed to keep these companies fully staffed and competitive. In addition, Alabama's public and private universities have a range of specializations and expertise and every community should reach out to those that are within your region. The large universities have specialized centers/institutes specifically designed to assist communities.

The Auburn University Government & Economic Development Institute (GEDI)'s mission is promoting effective government policy and management, civic engagement, economic prosperity and improved quality of life. Through assessments, feasibility studies, planning and education programming, GEDI works throughout the state teaching best practices and assisting communities one-on-one on a broad range of community, governance and economic development topics.

The University of Alabama Center for Economic Development's mission is to enhance the economic well-being

of Alabama communities by providing technical assistance and linkages to resources. Services include strategic planning, research, cultural/heritage/nature-based tourism development, trails and outdoor recreation planning, leadership development programming and workforce development assessments and planning.

Non-profit organizations that focus on educating and providing professional assistance to cities that are on the path of creating a better version of themselves, include:

Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) (alabamacommunitiesofexcellence.org): Founded in 2003, ACE is a three-phase program that assists communities with assessments, strategic planning, leadership development and comprehensive planning. ACE accomplishes this work through a volunteer team of professionals drawn from the public and private sector with minimal cost to the municipality.

DesignAlabama (designalabama.org): Founded in 1987 under the wing of the Alabama State Council on the Arts, DesignAlabama's programs create engagement between civic leaders, citizens and design professionals. DesignPlace and the Mayors Design Summit are annual events hosted by DesignAlabama at minimal cost to the municipality.

Main Street Alabama (mainstreetalabama.org): Affiliated with the National Main Street Program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and originally a program of the Alabama Historical Commission, Main Street Alabama utilizes the *Main Street Four-Point Approach* methodology which leverages local assets – from cultural or architectural heritage to local enterprises and community pride – to build a sustainable and complete community revitalization effort.

Your Town Alabama (yourtownalabama.com): Focused on design and planning, the Your Town three-day intensive workshop addresses a range of issues small and rural communities face as their town changes over time. The curriculum focuses on the process by which rural communities construct a vision for their future, evaluate natural and cultural assets and implement decisions about how their community should look and function.

As you travel around the country or visit our neighboring states, you'll notice that small and rural towns are proud to be small and rural and that they are building their future on their cultural and natural assets. Many Alabama towns are doing the same. Contact the resources on the above list and invite them to visit your town and dream with you. To quote Walt Disney, "The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing." ■

Nisa Miranda has held the position of Director of the University of Alabama Center for Economic Development (UACED) since 1995. UACED is the focal point to leverage University resources and partners with a specific focus on the community development process and capacity building at the local level. Prior to this appointment, she served for 10 years as the Director of the William R. Bennett Alabama International Trade Center, a premier research and trade development program. A native of Brazil, she holds an M.B.A. from the University of Alabama.

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Appalachian Regional Commission and Delta Regional Authority help Alabama communities improve quality of life

By: Jim Plott • Information Specialist • ADECA

In the early 1960s there was concern that many parts of Appalachia were falling behind the rest of the nation in employment, education opportunities, health care and basic infrastructure.

While there were multiple causes for that concern, one main reason was the area's isolation. The mountains and hills created a natural barrier between the people of Appalachia and other areas in the nation. What roads existed were often treacherous and in poor condition.

Also, while most of the United States was surging forward industrially after World War II, the Appalachian region temporarily boosted by a rise in coal production during the war, saw the demand for that product take a sharp decline.

The governors of several states that included parts of the Appalachian mountain chain took their concerns to Congress. In 1965, Congress approved the Appalachian Regional Development Act creating the Appalachian Regional Commission as a federal program to help provide solutions to those issues.

Today, the ARC's coverage area stretches into parts of 13 states which includes 37 Alabama counties.

Thirty-five years later, Congress created a similar agency, the Delta Regional Authority, to address similar problems along the Mississippi River Delta. Twenty Alabama counties, primarily in the southwestern part of the state, which suffer many of the same economic woes as those in the Delta were included in DRA's coverage area.

Legend
ARC/DRA Counties
Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)
Delta Regional Authority (DRA)

Management of ARC in Alabama became a part of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs after it was created by the Legislature in 1983. DRA has been a part of ADECA since its inception in 2000.

"Both the ARC and DRA programs have had tremendous impacts on communities and people throughout their coverage areas," ADECA Director Kenneth Boswell said. "Whether it is helping people increase skills through training to find better jobs or providing basic services like water or sewer, there is no doubt that these two programs have made lives better."

(Top) An ARC grant helped provide a mobile food truck to provide healthy foods in areas without immediate access to grocery stores. (Bottom) Residents in Sipsey shop for items in the Corner Market, a mobile food trailer that provides healthy foods in "food deserts" of rural and urban areas within Alabama ARC counties.

Appalachian Regional Commission

Designed as a federal-state-local partnership, the ARC has 14 members including the governors of the 13 member states and a federal co-chair who is appointed by the U.S. president. The agency focuses on specific goals: creating economic opportunities, preparing a ready workforce, improving or building infrastructure, investing in a community's natural or cultural assets and promoting leadership and community capacity.

In the past year, more than $10.1 million in ARC funds have been awarded to Alabama governments, learning institutions and public and private non-profit organizations. One such grant helped the town of Reform address an issue with its water system. After inspectors with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management cited deficiencies in the town's largest water storage tank, Reform applied for and in 2015 received a $131,890 ARC grant to address those problems.

"With an ARC grant, we were able to bring our 500,000-gallon water tank up to standards," Mayor Bennie Harton said. "We totally revamped the tank by sandblasting

continued on page 34

DRA Funding Supports York's Pop Start Program

A Community and Regional Standout

By: Jackie Clay • Director • Coleman Center for the Arts

The simplest definition of transformation is a thorough or dramatic change in form or appearance. In communities, transformation requires partnership, imagination and support.

Since 1985, the Coleman Center for the Arts has been working with artists and the citizens of Sumter County to make positive change in the region. Recently that work has focused on creating equitable downtowns and communities through Pop Start, which encompasses two storefronts in downtown York, a rural Black Belt municipality with a population just over 2,000. Co-Directors Emeritus Shana Berger and Nathan Purath imagined these spaces as venues for collaboration between local makers, contemporary artists, area citizens, professionals and students. Events included: Pop Up Pop Start, an exhibition that presented innovative businesses, artist spaces and storefronts for experimentation; Pop Luck, a community pot luck and unveiling of York's biggest picnic table (30 feet!); and *Family Dollar General Tree* (2014) a performance by New Orleans artist Bob Snead. Snead installed cardboard sculptures of household items frequently sold at dollar stores and then invited community members to join his faux assembly line – rolls of toilet paper, powerade drinks and detergent bottles were assembled out of the boxes in which they are shipped. The installation set contemporary art practice against consumerism in a whimsical investigation of labor and object making.

In the winter of 2016 Pop Start's HVAC system failed precipitating the space's already planned renovation. Through support from the Delta Regional Authority (DRA), ArtPlace America, and ongoing support from the Educational Foundation of America, one of the Pop Start storefronts underwent significant restoration. The folks at Old School Collaborative, LLC in Birmingham and RAC Construction, Co in Livingston provided the creative and building talent respectively. Alabama Tombigbee Regional Commission's Brandy Wilkerson assisted the Coleman Center through DRA's funding and construction process.

Pop Start continues to be nexus for change in the Black Belt. The College of Agricultural, Life and Natural Sciences at Alabama A&M University Small Farms Research Center, in collaboration with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, presented Crowd Grazing II where local farmers learned about community food systems and USDA government services. The space also hosted Congresswoman Terri A. Sewell's (D-AL) annual Congress in Your Community town hall meeting.

Pop Start supports diverse programming. The Coleman Center has initiated movement and coalition building strategies including Yoga 101, a free introductory yoga class, as well as a community mapping meeting, an event to build on Sumter County's community assets and resources. This past July, regional sign painter and Coleman Center teaching artist Creighton Tynes began work on Pop Start's exterior window. Tynes invited students from the Coleman Center annual summer camp to join him with hand lettering and aluminum leaf application. This fall the Coleman Center will welcome a new Pop Start Program Manager. With this dedicated leadership, support and energy, Pop Start and the broader community will continue to change *and* make change in Sumter County.

For more information, visit The Coleman Center for the Arts at wwwcolemanarts.org. ■

Coleman Center teaching artist Creighton Tynes paints Pop Start window sign with students from the Coleman Center Annual Summer Camp.

Design Place:

UNIQUE PROGRAM ASSISTS PRICEVILLE WITH COMMUNITY IDENTITY

DesignAlabama www.designalabama.org

"The Crossroads of North Alabama" is a fitting moniker for the Town of Priceville, a quiet community with a population around 3,000. Set on rolling hills just minutes from Huntsville and Decatur, it's the third largest municipality in Morgan County and the second fastest growing region in Alabama.

Such a prime location made Priceville ideally positioned for new design and planning initiatives with the help of DesignPlace, a program established by DesignAlabama in 2017 that brings together a team of experts to assist participating communities with design, planning and community identity. The team demonstrates how quality of life can improve when the design arts are put into action.

Priceville was the second community to participate in the program, which is open to Alabama communities that have been a part of DesignAlabama's Philip A. Morris Mayors Design Summit. Opelika was the first to participate and the City of Troy held a successful DesignPlace charrette in August. The primary objective of DesignPlace is to give communities and their mayors the opportunity to expand on the knowledge and ideas generated during their time at the Mayors Design Summit, which is held annually over two days and partners five mayors with professional design experts in a roundtable environment to create tangible solutions for design challenges facing their communities.

"Our organization found that many of our communities who participated in the Philip A. Morris Mayors Design Summit were going home with a great deal of excitement and enthusiasm about what they had done at the summit, but upon returning home were not sure how to expand on that enthusiasm or how to get started," explained DesignAlabama Executive Director Gina Clifford.

"We felt that DesignPlace would help to fill that missing piece of the puzzle, and, so far, it seems as though it is," she said. "Our team spends three days in each community we work with, looking at the community's assets and opportunities and how they can be harnessed into enhancing their community. The goal is not to remake a community, but to highlight what makes it special. We as an organization strive to increase the quality of life for all citizens of our state through good design and work to increase economic development using the tools of good design. Though these are the broad goals of the program, the specific objectives of each community charrette are different, as each community is unique and faces unique challenges."

Priceville's DesignPlace Experience

According to Mayor Melvin Duran, Priceville wanted a professional outside group to come in and evaluate the town's needs and help formulate its plan through 2040. As part of the DesignPlace program, DesignAlabama brought professional consultants to Priceville last November to gather information and create a preliminary "blueprint" based on input from local residents and community leaders.

Mayor Duran said among the most popular ideas to come out of Priceville's DesignPlace experience was the creation

More than 150 Priceville residents turned out during the first DesignPlace meeting to discuss a new direction for their town, including the development of a town center.

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of a town center to give residents a place to work, live and play. Ideas also included protecting and adding green spaces, adding neighborhood parks and sidewalks, as wells as widening streets to create "complete streets" as the budget allows.

"We are taking a strong stance on beautifying our town and looking more closely to our new developments," he said.

Clifford said Priceville is an ideal community for DesignPlace because of where it is in its growth pattern. The small community on the outskirts of Decatur is seeing a population boom thanks to its school system, small-town feel and other assets.

"Planning for what is coming is key for the community and that is what DesignPlace provided," Clifford said. "It made the community aware of how future development would affect their residents and retail, and how the choices they make with zoning, neighborhood development, connectivity and community identity would have huge impacts in the long run on quality of life and economic development – that it must be done in a way that maintains who they are as a community and that is consistent with quality planning and not sprawl."

Clifford further noted that Priceville is a community that cares, which was evident when more than 125 community members attended the first town hall meeting during the DesignPlace charrette.

"The community has a mayor with over 30 years of experience," she said. "Having a mayor who really knows his community will help aid the movement forward in planning for his community's needs."

Also moving Priceville forward is its Town Council, which is open to new ideas and planning for the future and is able to work effectively with its citizens and town leadership.

"The sky is the limit for how Priceville will benefit from DesignPlace," said Clifford. "The community has already started looking at community identity and working to shape how they identify and brand themselves to the outside world."

Priceville Councilmember Joe Lubisco said he was encouraged by the "fantastic turnout" at the first meeting and points to several factors that make Priceville ideal for change, including its crossroads location, amenities already in place, a higher-than-average median household and a commercial corridor that is "ripe for redevelopment." Another advantage is the amount of land available that can be developed through public and private partnerships.

"I don't think we've ever had anything like this in terms of community involvement," said Lubisco. "If you can get the community involved, then the community thrives."

A number of ideas were expressed at Priceville's public meetings and among those topping the list was its downtown – to bring more amenities downtown and redevelop it as a town center. Lubisco believes Priceville offers the best of both worlds – a small, hometown atmosphere and an easy commute to Huntsville.

Joey Hester, Director of Planning and Economic Development at North Central Alabama Regional Council of Governments believes Priceville's DesignPlace experience will be extremely beneficial for the community "What I see is the work created by the DesignAlabama team through the new DesignPlace initiative serving as the catalyst for a fresh approach to planning and development going forward in Priceville," he said. "This will only enhance the great quality of life already enjoyed by residents."

Hester is optimistic that DesignPlace will positively influence new retail, office, institutional, recreational and residential development through careful planning.

Mayor Duran said with the guidance of DesignPlace, Priceville now has a direction for future growth, which brings the possibilities of creating a downtown area, more recreational areas and updating the town's existing amenities. "We received numerous inputs from our citizens on what they wanted for Priceville in the future," he said. "Our citizens emphasized keeping Priceville a family-oriented municipality with planned growth. We know this process will not happen overnight, but with a good plan it *will* happen."

DesignPlace Selection Process

Two communities are chosen each year to participate in DesignPlace and are asked to pay a nominal fee for the program and help with the accommodations for the visiting charrette team, some of which can be donated in-kind by the community. It is important for the communities that participate in DesignPlace to be represented by a current or past mayor who participated in the Philip A. Morris Mayors Design Summit. DesignAlabama believes that the relationships formed during the mayors' design summit will enhance the DesignPlace experience. Organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, civic organizations and other local groups can also apply on behalf of the community and bring the program to their municipality.

"This is a community-based process, relying heavily on community input and so we encourage partnerships when communities apply," Clifford said. ▪

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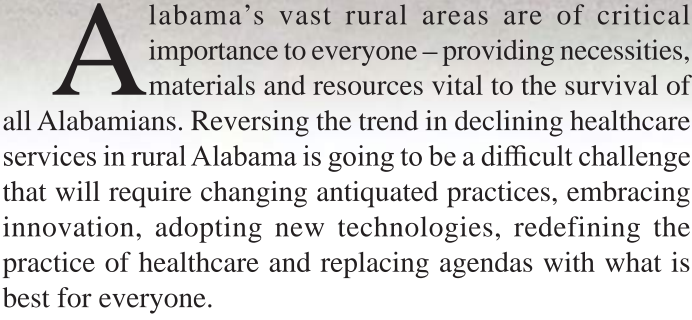


Alabama's vast rural areas are of critical importance to everyone – providing necessities, materials and resources vital to the survival of all Alabamians. Reversing the trend in declining healthcare services in rural Alabama is going to be a difficult challenge that will require changing antiquated practices, embracing innovation, adopting new technologies, redefining the practice of healthcare and replacing agendas with what is best for everyone.

Having adequate access to healthcare involves four primary assurances: 1. There must be primary care services locally available. 2. Those needing this service must be able to get to the care. 3. The care must be affordable. 4. Those needing care must be aware of their need and able to follow practitioner's instructions.

Local hospitals are of vital importance to our rural areas. They are among the largest employers in most rural counties and serve as a magnet in attracting other health-related services and other economic opportunity to the area. Alabama currently has seven rural counties with no hospital.

What is the current status of primary care services in rural Alabama?

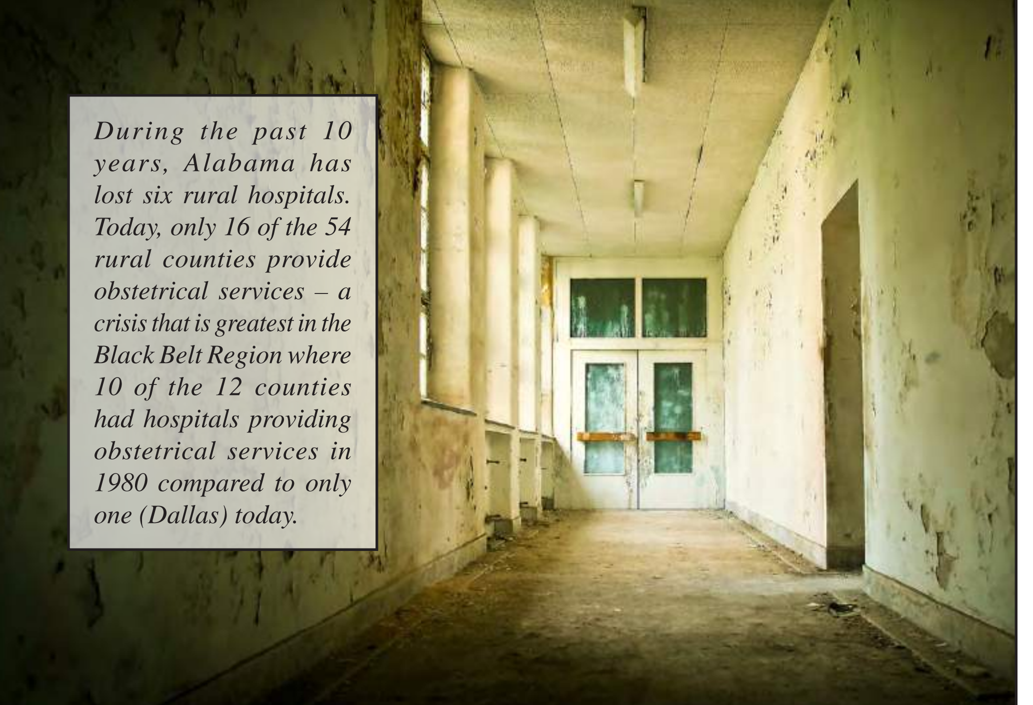
The provision of primary health care is measured in all states by the federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) working with state partners. HRSA required that all states, including Alabama, complete a reassessment of the primary care service that was available in late 2017. Prior to this reassessment, it was thought that Alabama needed approximately 157 additional primary care practitioners, providing service where they were needed the most, to provide the ***minimal*** level of care that was needed statewide. Following the 2017 reassessment, however, this need was increased to 278. Only three of our 54 rural counties – Coffee, Escambia and Pike – are considered to have the *minimal* primary care service that is needed.

With the "Aging of America", our population is getting older, and the presence of chronic diseases increases with age. The aging of Alabama's population is of greater impact in our rural areas. A study conducted by the Alabama Rural Health Association in 2009 determined that the number of office visits to primary care physicians in Alabama (not including emergency department visits) should increase by approximately 1,800,000 per year by 2025, primarily because of increasing chronic diseases among our aging population. Unfortunately, our actively practicing primary care physicians are also increasing in age along with this increasing demand for their services.

What is the current status of Alabama's rural hospitals?

According to data provided by the Chief Operating Officer of the Alabama Hospital Association, 84 percent of Alabama's rural hospitals currently have a net operating loss and 64 percent have a net total loss. Operating loss includes only the operation of the hospital. Total loss includes all services or facilities (nursing homes, home health, etc.) that are a part of the hospital. During the past 10 years, Alabama has lost six rural hospitals. These were in Clanton, Cullman, Elba, Florala, Roanoke, and Thomasville. National data ranks Alabama second or fourth among all states in the number of rural hospital closures, according to when the count is started. Fortunately, a new hospital has opened in Clanton, and a 29-bed facility is currently under development in Thomasville. Even so, Alabama is woefully behind.

Perhaps nowhere is the serious financial plight of our rural hospitals more visible than by looking at the loss of obstetrical services. The last step that most hospitals are forced to take before closing is to eliminate services that are consistently losing money, such as obstetrics and the



During the past 10 years, Alabama has lost six rural hospitals. Today, only 16 of the 54 rural counties provide obstetrical services – a crisis that is greatest in the Black Belt Region where 10 of the 12 counties had hospitals providing obstetrical services in 1980 compared to only one (Dallas) today.

emergency department. Alabama's hospitals are required to have an emergency department, but not to provide obstetrics. In 1980, 46 of our 54 rural counties had hospitals providing obstetrical services. Today, *only 16 of the 54 rural counties* provide this critical service – a crisis that is greatest in the Black Belt Region where 10 of the 12 counties had hospitals providing obstetrical services in 1980 compared to only one (Dallas) today.

What can be done to enhance healthcare in rural Alabama?

Alabama is far behind in placing primary care physicians in rural areas where they are needed the most. We have excellent, but small, programs for training rural physicians that are not even able to keep up with annual attrition. Alabama needs to take drastic measures to attract larger numbers of primary care practitioners to rural areas just to catch up. Such a program was proposed through legislation during the 2018 legislative session. This would have provided reimbursement for medical education in return for a service obligation in areas of greatest need for around 25 physicians a year.

There are critical shortages of other health care practitioners in rural Alabama that need to be addressed. Providing educational debt relief in return for a service obligation is often successful in securing this service. Communities in need of health care services can also offer incentives, such as office space, equipment, etc., to combine with educational debt relief programs.

Alabama has highly trained advanced practice nurses (nurse practitioners) and other mid-level practitioners who could be providing excellent rural health care services. Nurse practitioners and physicians working as partners can expand clinical hours beyond normal work hours, expand weekend services and provide relief from a stressful practice.

Rural Alabama hospital administrators would like the ability to staff emergency departments with nurse practitioners, especially during the slower early morning hours. This could provide substantial cost savings and is being done in many states, including Mississippi.

Alabama is also lagging in the utilization of telehealth. Alabama's Medicaid program reimburses for many telehealth services. Blue Cross/Blue Shield (BCBS) voluntarily reimburses for several types of telehealth care and should be applauded for this action. However, other private insurance companies operating in Alabama are not obligated to follow the BCBS practice. Georgia, Tennessee and Mississippi have mandated private insurance reimbursement for telehealth services through legislation. The fiscal impact of inadequate reimbursement may impact Alabama's rural hospitals more than those in any other state. While the logic behind expanding Medicaid when the federal government is in such great debt is questionable, Alabama needed to have participated in this expansion rather than allowing Alabamian's federal tax dollars to benefit Medicaid programs in other states with less need. There is also ongoing litigation alleging discrimination against rural hospitals in private insurance reimbursement practices.

Perhaps the greatest financial threat involves the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services practice of developing a Medicare Area Wage Index that determines what hospitals are reimbursed for Medicare services. A separate index is developed for each Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) in the nation with all counties in a state that are not in a MSA being considered rural. A separate index score is developed for the rural counties in each state. Wages paid by hospitals are used in developing this index. Hospitals in rural Alabama receive the lowest reimbursement for Medicare services in the entire nation, except for a few U.S. territories. Rural Alabama hospitals receive approximately one third of the reimbursement for the same services received in some areas. It is highly doubtful that this can be corrected using legislation since those areas benefiting are not likely to voluntarily give up their higher reimbursement. This may have to be corrected through litigation.

What is a rural hospital?

Alabama needs to modernize its definition of a rural hospital. Many of our rural hospitals have far more beds than are being used. Admission and discharge practices have changed. Alabama hospitals are required to have 15 or more beds and to operate an emergency department. The national trend in rural hospitals is to have fewer inpatient beds. Mississippi and Tennessee have hospitals that are surviving with only two or three beds. Where it is viable, many states allow the operation of hospitals without emergency departments.

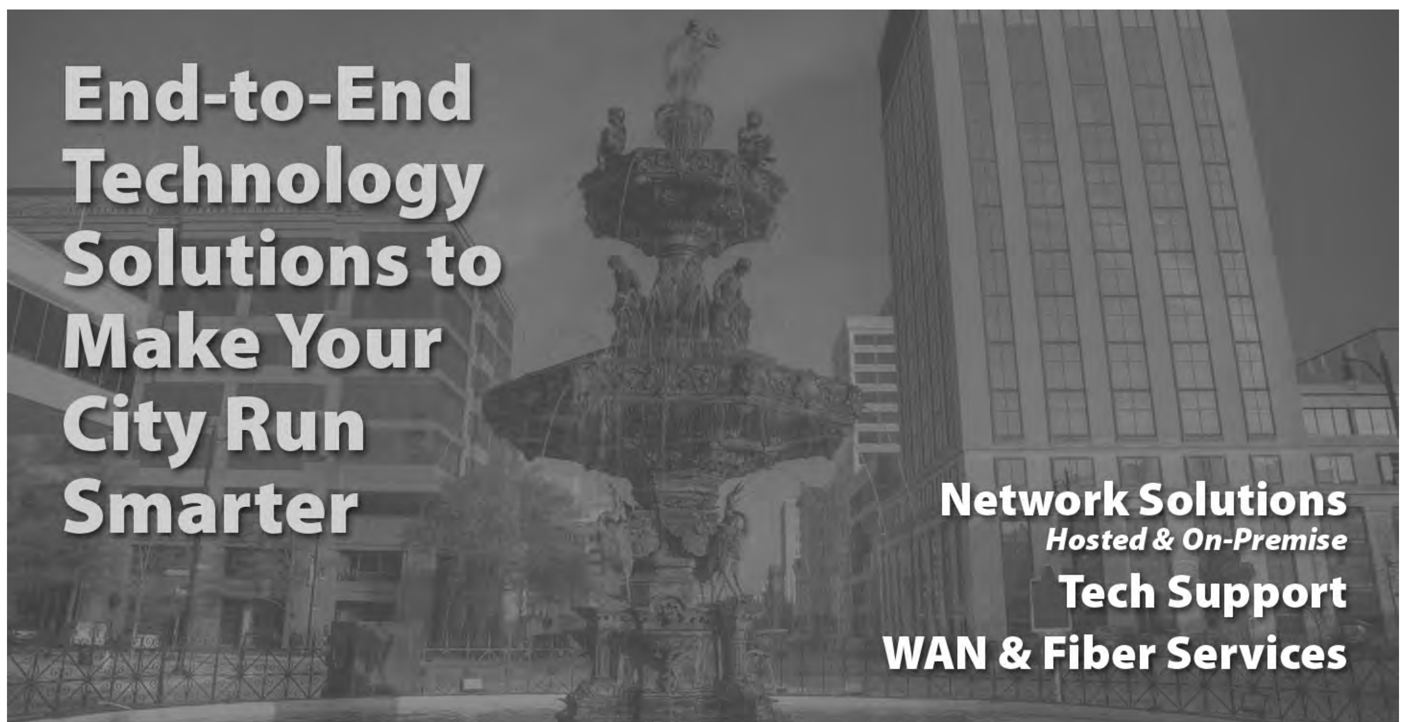
The proposed federal "Save Rural Hospitals Act" will create a "Community Outpatient Hospital" with only a few beds for observation. Higher reimbursement for selected services will serve as an incentive to operate without inpatient services. Alabama's 15 or more bed requirement will prevent such hospitals from operating here. Older Alabama hospitals that are being rebuilt must also have 15 or more beds rather than the actual number that is needed in today's health environment.

Rural hospitals with more beds than are needed must find new sources of revenue to survive financially. Ideas include providing housing, health care and board for immobile and nonthreatening corrections residents in response to the existing federal court order on corrections health care; the Veteran's Administration contracting with local hospitals for veteran's inpatient health care services; and obtaining a Medicaid waiver to reimburse for adult day care.

Closing thoughts …

Far too often we elect officials and abandon them to solve problems alone. The Coalition for a Healthier Escambia County model provides a potentially valuable resource for our local officials and residents to use in improving local areas. This coalition meets regularly and has membership representing the entire community – healthcare components, government, business, industry, education, law enforcement, the clergy, etc. Members of such coalitions identify the needs and challenges in the area, develop workable solutions and collaborate with one powerful voice to secure necessary resources to help solve problems. All rural counties are encouraged to develop such a coalition. ▪

Dale Quinney is the founder of Operation Save Rural Alabama, www.osral.net, and was executive director of the Alabama Rural Health Association until his retirement this past April.



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average but it's the first time Wilcox County has been in single digits in *forever* and this past June was the first time – officially – they weren't the highest unemployment county in the state. These are manufacturing jobs and they are stable."

Know your strengths, plan forward and think beyond your municipal borders.

Day sums up regional rural success with a favorite Teddy Roosevelt quote: *Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.*

"If you're not on an interstate, you're wasting your time going after industry that typically locates on an interstate," he said. "In Thomasville's case, our asset is the railroad. Virtually every project we go after, industrial-wise, is a vital user of railroad. There's only about 15 percent of the projects that are looking at Alabama to locate that need access to rail; however, there's only about 15 to 20 percent of the communities in the state that have access to rail. So we are on the short list of communities that have the resources and industrial parks already in place for an industry that needs access to rail – and we planned all that as we went forward. Planning and looking at all your resources is essential – but looking past your city limits and past your county line is also crucial."

For instance, if an industry asks if Thomasville has a port, Day immediately says yes – the Port of Mobile as well as the port on the Tombigbee River located in the City of Jackson 30 miles away. "You have to consider all the resources within a 40, 50 – even a 100-mile radius and make that part of your sales pitch," he said. "You've got to know where your best infrastructure is, how accessible it is, what are the limitations – compile your data and be prepared. It's also important to talk with your Congressional Delegation about projects because they have ideas about working with other agencies, such as EDA, to make things happen. Do all your homework ahead of time because sometimes you may only have a 24-hour window to answer the questions that will lead to the next step. Work closely with your Chamber – whether it's the county Chamber or local Chamber. Bring *all* your resources to the table, such as Alabama Power, PowerSouth and others. You need to have good relationships with these entities because when an industry is looking to locate, they've got to have infrastructure. Everyone must sing from the same songbook. Our Industrial Board, our Chamber of Commerce, our City – we're all on the same page all the time."

Day emphasizes collaboration above all else. "Unfortunately, in the Black Belt, there's less collaboration than other regions because communities are so starved for *a* project – any project – they're scared someone might steal it, so they don't work together," he said. "You also have some municipalities where the relationship between the mayor and council is toxic. It can't just be a one-person show; it must be a team effort – and you've also got to be willing to let other people lead. Yes, we need the state and federal government to come to the table, but we can't wait on them to do it – *we* have to get started first, creating the dream, creating the vision. And you can't do that if you don't work together."

Success begets success, but you must work for it.

Day said Thomasville worked diligently to increase its technology threshold – no small feat in Alabama's Black Belt and an effort that did not happen quickly. Collaboration and determination were key. "I worked closely with AT&T and their regional governmental affairs director for years regarding the future development of Thomasville and the need for additional broadband and the need to enhance those services in our industrial parks to accommodate industries that were moving into our area," he said. "So, starting about five years ago, we worked really hard with AT&T to bring major fiber into our area. Last year they finished that effort. Now all five of our industrial parks are certified "Fiber Ready". They all received their certification at the same time in 2017."

With the expansion of high-speed data access, another crucial element to community and regional quality of life is about to become a reality: a state-of-the-art medical park. The Thomasville Regional Medical Center is a 35-acre complex with a $40 million, 29-bed hospital currently under construction and the potential for additional medical businesses. "We're about to be, in my opinion, the regional provider for healthcare with our new medical facility," Day said. "It's going to change the dynamic."

Be a model and a mentor for others.

"We've got to teach people to dream again – especially in rural areas," Day said. "Rural areas have a deep inferiority complex because they've been told for so long that people won't go there or you can't do something because you're rural."

To that end, Day is doing his part by hosting officials and leaders from throughout Alabama and beyond to share Thomasville's story, as well as his enthusiasm for rural living. "We've had dozens of communities from all over the South – Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee – visit to look at what we're doing," he said. He also encourages others to read Dr. Grisham's *Extraordinary Results in Ordinary Communities – Transforming Towns and Growing People,* published by the Kettering Foundation (2010). "If you just read that one book," he said, "you realize that, for the most part, our destiny is in our own hands. At the end of the day, if we're doing a good job communicating with the citizens – and the missions of the Chamber and the City and others overlap – and if we have a collaborative relationship with civic groups and nonprofits, the schools and our stakeholders, things *will* happen."

Thomasville's model is a 22-year journey that continues to evolve – and proof that regional rural success is attainable. ■

Quick Guide for Workforce Development Success in Alabama Communities

By: Austin T. Monk • Director of Workforce Training Solutions • Wallace State Community College

Alabama provides an excellent investment opportunity for companies in an ever-changing global economy. We live in exciting times as new companies locate in our state and invest in the resources we have to offer. Recently new industries have landed in Alabama including Amazon, Google, Facebook, Yorozu and Toyota-Mazda. Additionally, existing business and industry that have helped grow our economy in the past continue to reinvest and grow their footprint. Alabama's secret to retaining its competitive edge is built on a team approach and a specific emphasis on workforce development initiatives as an essential part of recruitment and retention strategy.

Workforce Development Essentials:

- Know your Market and Existing Resources
- Partner with Organizations that Increase Training Opportunities
- Engage with Industry Partners to Assess Needs
- Identify Collaborative Funding Strategies
- Evaluate Success and Promote It
- Repeat

Know Your Market and Existing Resources:

Locate data resource(s) available through a public or private entity to give a snapshot of available skilled or unskilled individuals. Use the data to categorize who is trained, what level they are trained to, where they are located in your community and how many in the workforce should be added to meet demands of industry. Furthermore, take time to learn about the training resources available for your local and regional workforce. Visit a local career-technical academy, community college or other regional training provider in your area and establish a relationship with the instructors and directors. Identify the credentials and certifications available at the institution and why they are useful for community members to gain to earn high demand, high wage jobs. Lastly, if these training resources are not readily available, consider using under-utilized buildings and spaces in the community as non-traditional training spaces. Understanding your supply of workers and the training assets available to your community enhances your abilities to promote and meet expectations of new or existing companies.

***Partner with Organizations that Increase Training Opportunities*:**

One of the most important aspects of enhancing workforce development in a community is to invest, support and partner with workforce development organizations. Partnering with organizations such as local economic development agencies, chambers of commerce, secondary, post-secondary and statewide training providers offer a customized approach to begin or expand existing training options. The effort also shows industry that your community is committed to providing quality opportunities to meet labor demands.

***Engage with Industry Partners to Assess Needs*:**

Reach out to companies that currently exist in your community and begin a conversation surrounding needs associated with their workforce. Let the industry partner know that there are resources available to assist them with their needs. Offer to invite and facilitate the right resources to the conversation to meet the needs expressed by the company. Active listening is a key part of this activity and it is important to keep it engaging by adding the right workforce training organization or training component. Hosting a roundtable discussion or working with chambers of commerce or local economic development organizations to create this conversation is always helpful.

***Identify Collaborative Funding Strategies*:**

Another way to partner with training providers is by working to tap into collaborative funding strategies. Based on where your community is located in the state, federal funding sources can be available to assist in workforce development training efforts. Resources include but are not limited to:

Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) Grants

Example: https://www.accs.cc/index.cfm/news/wallace-state-community-college-awarded-arc-grant-for-winston-county-works-project/

Resource: https://www.arc.gov/funding/ARCProjectGrants.asp

Delta Regional Authority (DRA) SEDAP Grants.

Example: http://dra.gov/initiatives/reimagining-the-delta-workforce/technical-assistance-and-capacity-building-funding-program/

Resource: http://dra.gov/funding-programs/investing-in-the-delta/

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the inside and having it painted. In the process, we have the benefit of healthier drinking water for our residents."

That same year water and sewer improvements through a $1.69 million ARC grant to the town of Shorter helped pave the way for 40 new jobs. The infrastructure extensions made it possible for LogisAll USA, a supplier to the nearby automobile manufacturing industries in Montgomery and West Point, Ga., to occupy a plant in the Macon County town bordering Interstate 85.

(Above) ARC funds helped Alabama honor Olympic gold medalist and Alabama native Jesse Owens with a museum in his honor in his hometown of Oakville in Lawrence County. The museum attracts people throughout the world particularly during Olympic years. (Below) A statue of Olympian Jesse Owens outside the museum in Oakville.

Municipal water was a must for the project because proof of adequate fire protection was necessary to obtain insurance on the building.

That project also illustrates how ADECA grant programs can be combined to reach maximum potential. In addition to the ARC funding, the town also received a $400,000 Community Development Block Grant from ADECA for the project.

Shorter could have opted to pursue DRA funding for the project. Macon County, along with Hale and Pickens counties are situated in both the DRA and ARC regions.

ARC programs have also been recently initiated to assist people in coal-mining regions who lost their jobs as a result of changes in the nation's energy policies.

Delta Regional Authority

DRA funds have had a huge economic impact in Alabama's Black Belt region, a string of counties stretching across southern Alabama from the Georgia to Mississippi state lines. Most Alabama Black Belt counties are in the DRA coverage area, and municipalities within those counties are eligible for funding. During the past 15 years, DRA has invested nearly $15.1 million in the region.

"The Delta Regional Authority has provided an incredible injection of infrastructure and job training funds and has helped with many small to medium-sized projects in our area," said John Clyde Riggs, executive director of the Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission, a regional agency that assists local governments with many issues and projects in 10 counties, all of which are eligible for DRA funds.

"We have had a lot of situations where a city, county or industrial board needed funds to help bring in a new industry or help an existing one expand, but they couldn't come up with money," Riggs said. "DRA in many instances provided those funds."

DRA funds were one of many sources of grants used to help land GD Copper, a China-based copper tubing manufacturer near Pine Hill in Wilcox County, said Frank Dobson, assistant executive director of the Alabama Tombigbee Regional Commission.

"ADECA through DRA provided a multi-phase grant for purchase of the land that GD Copper is on," Dobson said. "DRA was one of five different sources of money. Now that company has employed 350 people in Wilcox County, one of the poorest counties in the country."

DRA through its Delta Leadership Institute also offers

(Above) DRA is a partner with the U.S. Department of Defense in providing free health care screenings and treatment in Alabama's Blackbelt Region. This year, Innovative Readiness Training medical clinics were conducted in Thomasville and Monroeville.

DRA monies along with other grants were essential in helping Golden Dragon Copper build a plant near Pine Hill. The plant employs 350 people.

training to hone the skills of local leaders and provide them with the knowledge and skills to make improvements and address the most pressing issues in their communities and the region.

With health care a primary concern of DRA, the agency partners with the U.S. Department of Defense to provide no-cost medical care for DRA residents. Earlier this summer, military physicians and medical specialists conducted clinics in Thomasville and Monroeville that provided basic health screenings, dental and optical services to hundreds of area residents. These clinics are conducted on a rotating basis in DRA states.

A main component of both the ARC and DRA programs are the Local Development Districts which are essentially the local regional commissions like the Alabama Tombigbee Regional Commission located throughout the state.

In both programs, eligible projects are approved at the federal level at the recommendation of the governor in the affected state.

For more information on the programs and information about how to apply for funding, visit adeca.alabama.gov or contact Kelly Chasteen, ARC and DRA program manager at ADECA, at 334-353-2909 or Kelly.Chasteen@adeca.alabama.gov.

Workforce Development

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The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) can provide assistance to communities that would like to apply for these grant opportunities. These federal grants along with the technical assistance from ADECA can increase the impact and sustainability of community workforce strategy.

***Evaluate Success and Promote It*:**

Once resources are aligned, you can now create a well-trained, agile workforce specific to your existing industry or a new industry you plan to recruit. Consistently communicate the value of your resources you have at your disposal and the ability to work to meet needs. Work with your regional workforce partners to encourage the promotion and success of partnerships. Share the success of those who have completed training programs and encourage the evaluation of the training by business and industry partners.

***Repeat*:**

Success reaps success. Leaders of Alabama communities who want to challenge themselves to engaging partnerships and purpose-led investment in workforce development will reap success. Keep up the great work already in motion and share with others who want to create jobs and improve our economy. ■

Austin earned a BA in Public Administration and a Masters of Public Administration with a minor in Economic and Community Development from Auburn University. He has completed leadership studies from Harvard University and professional studies at The University of Oklahoma's Economic Development Institute (EDI). Austin has served in many regional and statewide economic and workforce development roles. Currently, he serves as Director of Workforce Training Solutions at Wallace State Community College in Hancevill. He previously served as Director of Workforce Development at Bishop State Community College in Mobile.

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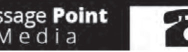

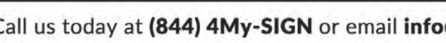

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Why revitalize downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts?

Did you know a community's central business district can account for as much as 30 percent of a town's jobs and 40 percent of its tax base? Think of your district as a whole entity and you will be amazed at the economic impact in private and public dollars, business and job creation and volunteer hours contributed. While the Downtown or Neighborhood Commercial District is an economic asset, it also a community's crossroad – a place in our hearts and minds that evokes strong emotions and helps define our identity.

points of the Main Street approach work together to build a sustainable and complete community revitalization effort.

In past years approaches to revitalization, from urban renewal to paint-up and fix-up projects, have failed because they focused on just one or two problems, rather than dealing with the full commercial district. The Main Street Program's approach to district revitalization has succeeded in thousands of towns and cities throughout the nation. Main Street is a volunteer driven, boots on the ground, implementation-oriented program that focuses on community assets and authentic history. Designated Main Street communities are required to have staff, a board and committees to implement the desired projects in the Four-Point Approach.

The Main Street Approach

"Every community and commercial district is different, with its own distinctive assets and sense of place. The Main Street Approach™ offers community-based revitalization initiatives with a practical, adaptable framework for downtown transformation that is easily tailored to local conditions. The Main Street Approach helps communities get started with revitalization and grows with them over time. Main Street Alabama is part of a nation-wide network working with Main Street America, the National Main Street Center." (www.mainstreet.org/mainstreetamerica/theapproach)

Main Street Alabama requires Designated Main Street communities to report economic impact in their districts each month. Numbers are gathered regarding public and private investments on building renovations, new construction, public improvement projects, businesses opening and closing, jobs gained and lost as well as volunteer hours contributed to the district. The numbers in the blue box represent cumulative totals for ALL our designated communities since June of 2014. To see the impact numbers of individual communities, visit **mainstreetalabama.org**, click on communities and scroll to the bottom of the community page.

Focused Approach

Main Street Alabama uses a proven model that has produced impressive revitalization results in many other states: the Main Street Four-Point Approach®. This method leverages local assets to revitalize their districts, from cultural or architectural heritage to local enterprises and community pride. The four

The Main Street Approach is a process through which the four points are integrated into a comprehensive program designed to build upon local opportunities and to build community self-reliance for district economic development. This involves not only attention to all four points of the Main Street Approach, but also careful adaptation of the Approach to each community's specific needs. Main Street Alabama begins the journey of a newly designated community with an organizational kick off, followed closely with a Resource Team. This visit is comprehensive, and the team's investigation, observations, recommendations and implementation strategies follow the Main Street Four-Point Approach to downtown revitalization: Organization, Promotion, Design and Economic Vitality.

Organization: A strong organizational foundation is key for a sustainable Main Street revitalization effort. This can

take many forms, from a stand-alone non-profit organization, to a special assessment district, to a program housed in a municipality or existing community development entity. Regardless of the organizational type, the focus is on ensuring that all organizational resources (partners, funding, volunteers) are mobilized to effectively implement transformative strategies.

Promotion: Promoting Main Street takes many forms, the goal is to position the downtown or commercial district as the center of the community and the hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases a community's unique characteristics. This can be done through highlighting cultural traditions, celebrating architecture and history, encouraging local businesses to market cooperatively, offering coordinated specials and sales, and hosting special events aimed at changing perceptions of the district and communicating to residents, investors, businesses and property-owners that this place is special.

Design: A focus on Design supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical elements of the district while capitalizing on the unique historic assets that set the commercial district apart. Main Streets enhance their appeal to residents and visitors alike with attention to public space through the creation of pedestrian friendly streets, inclusion of public art in unexpected areas, visual merchandising, adaptive reuse of older and historic buildings, more efficiently-designed buildings, transit-oriented development, and much more.

Economic Vitality: Revitalizing a downtown or neighborhood commercial district requires focusing on the underlying Economic Vitality of the district. This work is rooted in a commitment to making the most of a community's unique sense of place and existing historic assets, harnessing local economic opportunity and creating a supportive business environment for small business owners and the growing scores of entrepreneurs, innovators and localists alike. With the nation-wide growing interest in living downtown, supporting downtown housing is also a key element of building Economic Vitality.

Main Street Programs are more than having great events and making districts look better. At its core, Main Street is an ***Economic Development*** tool that:

- Enhances the tax base of a community
- Fosters entrepreneurship
- Builds community capacity
- Creates partnerships among key groups in a community
- Market definition tracks where the shoppers are coming from and helps define where to market the community. Trade area definition is where the most reliable customers come from.
- Economic Vitality is the "glue" that puts together the other points and can be the key partner group with peer economic development partners.

Alabama's Downtowns

In Alabama, our downtowns are the heart of our communities. They are the core of our architectural and cultural heritage; the places where people gather to celebrate, the place where communities big and small are reinventing the way Alabama does business.

Today, Alabamians are looking at our downtowns not simply as places for memories but also as places for bold economic opportunity. New restaurants are coming to small towns; long time businesses are discovering new ways to thrive; and creative downtown events are breathing new life into once empty streets. Our communities are rediscovering that the uniqueness of our historic downtowns offers a new frontier for innovation, creativity, collaboration and economic prosperity. Our state recognizes the importance of our downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts in preserving history, celebrating diversity and providing economic opportunity.

In a few short years, Main Street Alabama has expanded to include small towns, cities and urban commercial districts across the state into a network of volunteers, professionals and partners with these simple goals: to provide training, networking, and educational opportunities to galvanize community leaders, merchants and citizens with tools necessary to help turn their downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts into powerful economic development engines.

Main Street Alabama's approach inspires people young and old not only to give back to their community but also to come back to their hometowns – to live, to become entrepreneurs, to breathe new life into our downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts and, most importantly, to remember what is old can be new and thriving again. For more information about Main Street Alabama please visit our website at: **mainstreetalabama.org** or call 205.910.8819.

Upcoming Training Opportunities

October 24th: Curb'd creates immersive public experiences in the area of a parking space or other public space in a downtown or neighborhood commercial district. The goals of Curb'd are to support business districts by promoting walkability, connectivity, placemaking and to showcase design talent through quasi-temporary public installations. Parklets are a temporary use of a parking space within the public right of way that creates a more pedestrian-friendly environment and expands the social-life of the street.

Dec. 4th: WEBINAR – What is Branding? Decades ago branding was defined as a name, slogan, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these elements that identify products or services of a company. Today branding is a bit more complex, but even more important in today's world of marketing, it's the perception that a consumer has when they hear or think of your business name, service or product.

Resource Team Report: Montevallo

During the Resource Team visit we take time to observe and focus on assets in the community:

People. We look for the ability to look at one's self honestly, to look past the negatives and see a future for the district. We look for a good energy level, for those who live in and love their community and will support the efforts and roll up their sleeves and get to work to accomplish the dream.

Location and History. We look at the proximity to attractions, location and unique history of each community. Why did people settle there originally?

Businesses. We seek to understand the business mix of today while investigating the original economic reasons for settling in the community. Is there an anchor business or institution? We look at the market potential to build up the existing businesses, perhaps adding a new product line or a new business.

Promotion. What are the recreational offerings in the area? Historical or heritage events unique to the community? Image building activity or opportunity to change negative impressions? What activities are in place to help "ring the cash register" for the businesses in the district? Building on the traditional community events and activities already in place help form the foundation for enhanced marketing of the district.

Buildings. We look at the unique stock of buildings in the district and set out on exploring the potential that lies in the district. We know that even those buildings that are underutilized are full of opportunity and with the right mix of marketing, the right mix of businesses, investment in renovation buildings, some elbow grease – those buildings will see new life.

Market Analysis: Heflin

This Market Profile, prepared as part of a more comprehensive market study project and services being provided by Main Street Alabama, highlights and summarizes important demographic, lifestyle and retail data, characteristics and trends

in the marketplace. Heflin Main Street and community partners are taking a pro-active and catalytic approach to planning for the future prosperity of Heflin's traditional downtown business district.

Branding: Jasper

The branding provided by Main Street Alabama:

- To develop a brand system reflective of the energy and activity happening with Downtown Jasper as a place and Jasper Main Street as an organization.
- To use the identity brand system as a tool to capture community pride, encourage ongoing economic development, and cultivate the guest experience in downtown.
- To be respectful of the upcoming branding for Walker County.
- To expand the brand identity to environmental graphics that curate the visitor experience.
- To develop a marketing program around the brand that can be easily expanded and shared. ■

To learn more, visit:

mainstreetalabama.org

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Mental Health:
Changing the Narrative in Alabama

Kayla Farnon • Advocacy Communications Coordinator • ALM

> *The first step to eradicating stigma is to replace fiction with facts.*
> ~ Commissioner Lynn Beshear

On July 10, 2017, Lynn T. Beshear was appointed commissioner of the Alabama Department of Mental Health. Commissioner Beshear began her career as a staff nurse in the Intensive Care Nursery at Duke University Medical Center and became the head nurse in the Well-Baby Nursery the following year. After moving to Montgomery in 1978, Commissioner Beshear's focus turned to making a difference in the lives of the citizens of central Alabama.

In 1999, Beshear, along with Reverend Dr. Mark LaBranche; Tom Miller, M.D. of the Alabama Department of Public Health; and Martha Jinright of the Gift of Life Foundation, founded the Montgomery Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and the Alabama Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Beshear was in Class III of both Leadership Montgomery and of Leadership Alabama and served as the founding chair of the Leadership Montgomery Alumni Association, as well as the first executive director. From October 2000 through July 2017, when she was appointed to serve as the Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Mental Health, she served as the only executive director of Envision 2020, a community-driven strategic planning effort involving citizens and leaders in the central Alabama counties designed to develop 25 shared goals related to the quality of life through the use of active partnerships to overcome challenges and increase opportunities.

Through her extensive experience in leadership roles and passion for the citizens of Alabama, Commissioner Beshear is working to change the narrative at the Department of Mental Health as well as the stigma attached to mental illness and substance abuse. “There is a tremendous prejudice around mental illness and substance abuse – a lot of people think this is a character flaw and they need to pull themselves together, but that's not the case – it's very real,” said Commissioner Beshear. “The Department has made a lot of progress in some arenas, but in others we have not. And attitudes might be one of them. That is a continuous task that we have – and our biggest challenge, in rural or urban Alabama, is the stigma attached to mental illness.”

Programs to Combat the Alabama Opioid Epidemic

A coordinated effort between the Alabama Department of Mental Health and the Alabama Department of Public Health is being offered to address the opioid epidemic in our state. Recently, Alabama received a federal grant that

charged the state with dispensing Opioid Overdose Reversal Kits. In 2017, the state received more than 5,000 kits, which were dispensed to first responders in an effort to address the opioid crisis. That same federal grant was renewed in 2018, and the state expects to dispense another 5,000 plus kits. To find out how your municipality can apply for a kit, contact Carter English at (334) 242-3216 or carter.english@mh.alabama.gov. English serves as the Department's Pharmacist and works with the Department of Public Health to dispense the medication.

Mental Health First Aid

In terms of prevention, the Department is offering a training called Mental Health First Aid. According to the Department's website, Mental Health First Aid is an 8-hour course that gives people the skills to help someone who is developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. Alabama has more than 90 certified instructors offering classes near you. Mental Health First Aid is intended for all people and organizations that make up the fabric of a community. Trainees are taught how to apply the evidence-based five step action plan in a variety of situations such as helping someone through a panic attack, engaging with someone who may be suicidal or assisting an individual who has overdosed.

"Mental Health First Aid is a wonderful resource for children in rural Alabama," said Commissioner Beshear. "In the wake of the Sandy Hook crisis, our Department, along with the Department of Education, voluntarily came together and created a program where children could be carefully identified in school as maybe needing some extra attention. The school would reach out to a local mental health center and the mental health center would then provide a therapist to come into the school. For children or parents in rural Alabama who would typically have to miss an entire day of class or work, this is a great asset."

Currently, the program is offered in 36 of Alabama 137 school districts as well as 12 mental health centers. During the 2018 Legislative Session, the Legislature allotted an additional $500,000 to the Department. With that, their goal is to grow and stabilize the program into more school districts and mental health centers. For more information on how to become certified or how to become an instructor, visit **www.mh.alabama.gov**.

What can municipal leaders do?

The Stepping Up Initiative is a national program that came to fruition in the summer of 2015 with the purpose of reducing the number of people with mental illness and substance use disorders in jail. Currently, 15 Alabama counties have passed a resolution in support of Stepping Up, with 452 being passed nationwide. The Department of Mental Health is very focused on Alabama becoming a Stepping Up state and encourages municipal leaders to become engaged with the program and spearhead discussions with county commissioners to understand the importance of passing a resolution. "This is the perfect vehicle for cities and counties to come together with community engagement," said Commissioner Beshear.

For more information, visit **www.stepuptogether.org**. ■

When we put our energy behind our communities, we all thrive.

Here's to the many cities and towns that make up the great state of Alabama. We're proud to support you as you continue to advance this state we call home.

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The Legal Viewpoint

By Rob Johnston, Assistant General Counsel

The New TNC
What does it mean to your Municipality?

During the 2018 Legislative Session, Alabama Legislative Act No. 2018-127 ("Act") was signed into law with an effective date of July 1, 2018. This Act deals with digital network transportation companies, such as Uber and Lyft, and it created the framework for the statewide regulation of transportation network companies ("TNC") and TNC drivers.

The Act removed municipal taxing and licensure authority on TNCs, and instead, placed TNCs under the regulatory jurisdiction of the Alabama Public Service Commission ("PSC"). As such, TNCs and TNC drivers must obtain a permit from the PSC in order to operate in your municipality.

In addition to permitting, the PSC is responsible for collecting a local assessment fee and distributing it to your municipality. The PSC is required to prepare and maintain a file that shows county and municipal boundaries. The Act also tasks the PSC with TNC records inspection, investigating and resolving complaints against TNCs or TNC drivers, administering penalties for noncompliance with the Act, and implementing administrative TNC rules. In creating the administrative TNC rules, the PSC hosted a workshop to gather information and suggestions from interested parties, and it provided a period of time for public comments on the proposed rules. The Alabama League of Municipalities, several municipalities and two airport authorities submitted comments on the PSC's proposed rules. In June, 2018, the PSC issued its final TNC rules. Those rules, along with orders and public comments, are available on the PSC website at: **www.psc.state.al.us.** Now that the Act and the TNC rules are in effect, this article attempts to answer some common questions on how it impacts your municipality.

What is a TNC?

A TNC is an business or entity using a digital network to connect a rider to a driver in exchange for a prearranged ride for a fee. A digital network is an online-enabled application, software, website or system used by the TNC. Uber and Lyft are currently the most common TNCs. Customers typically use a smartphone application to connect to TNC driver for a prearranged ride.

What is *not* a TNC?

Shared expense carpool or vanpool arrangements, regional transportation companies and licensed motor carriers are specifically excluded from the category of a prearranged ride. A taxi cab is an example of a licensed motor carrier

How do customers pay for the TNC ride?

Customers typically pay a trip fare online. The gross trip fare is the sum of a base fare charge, distance charge, and time charge for a complete trip at rates published on the TNCs website. A TNC is prohibited from imposing additional charges for providing services to individuals with physical disabilities because of those disabilities.

What amount of each ride is paid to the municipality?

Each TNC will collect a local assessment fee equal to one percent of the total gross trip fare for all prearranged rides that originate in the municipality.

How is it determined where a prearranged ride begins?

The PSC will publish on its website a geographic information system ("GIS") showing county and municipal boundaries. TNCs use the boundaries indicated on the GIS file to determine where each ride originates. Municipalities must provide annexation information to the PSC within 30 days after the annexation is complete.

How much will a municipality receive from the local assessment fee?

It depends on how much TNC revenue is generated in the municipality. Each TNC will collect a local assessment fee equal to one percent of the total gross trip fare for all prearranged rides that originate in the municipality. The TNC will submit a report to the PSC listing the percentage of the gross trip fare that originated in each municipality. The TNC will also remit to the PSC the local assessment fee amount. The PSC will distribute the local assessment fee to the municipality. The Act makes no provision where the PSC withholds any portion of the local assessment fee.

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Legal Clearinghouse

Rob Johnston, Assistant General Counsel

NOTE: Legal summaries are provided within this column; however, additional background and/or pertinent information will be added to some of the decisions, thus calling your attention to the summaries we think are particularly significant. When trying to determine what Alabama law applies in a particular area or on a particular subject, it is often not enough to look at a single opinion or at a single provision of the Code of Alabama. A review of the Alabama Constitution, statutory law, local acts, administrative law, local ordinances and any relevant case-law may be necessary. We caution you *not* to rely solely on a summary, or any other legal information, found in this column. You should read each case in its entirety for a better understanding.

ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OPINIONS

Courts: A municipal employee may not oversee the administrative functions and personnel in municipal court. A city clerk may not also perform the functions of a municipal court clerk. AGO 2018-033.

Utility Boards: An electric utility board established under section 11-50-490, et seq., of the Code of Alabama may not enter into loan agreements with customers for the purchase of a new heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system without violating section 94 of article IV of the Recompiled Constitution of Alabama. AGO 2018-035.

Employees: The City of Trussville is not subject to the Civil Service System of Jefferson County and has the implied power to establish its own civil service system for all municipal employees, but it is statutorily required to have a civil service system for its law enforcement officers. If the city creates a new civil service system for its employees, employees with vested rights under the Civil Service System of Jefferson County must have those rights continued under the new system and administered in a way that does not take away those vested rights. The determination of what rights are vested requires a factual determination for each employee. AGO 2081-036.

Ad Valorem Taxes: Ad Valorem Vacant lots bought from a residential subdivision may be classified as Class III property and assessed at current use value if the revenue commissioner determines that the lots are no longer being held as commercial property and are instead used for a qualifying purpose. AGO 2018-038.

Auctions: Internet auctions do not constitute auction businesses under section 34-4-2(6) of the Code of Alabama falling under the jurisdiction of the Board of Auctioneers if they do not involve bid calling present in traditional crying auctions. AGO 2018-040.

Legal Notices: Publications: A newspaper that has not been in circulation for 51 weeks is ineligible to run legal notices, including the list of qualified voters. Only a newspaper that is capable of meeting all of the requirements of section 6-8-60 of the Code of Alabama may publish legal notices. AGO 2018-041.

Grants: Absent the passage of new legislation, tax-exempt entities, nonprofit entities, college and universities are required to file a disclosure statement when submitting a grant proposal to the Council on the Arts if the grant exceeds $5,000. Local governmental entities or state departments submitting a proposal are not required to file the statement. AGO 2018-042. ▪

SAVE THE DATE!

Upcoming League Events

Municipal Leadership Institute*
& CMO Graduation Ceremony
October 4, 2018 - Prattville

2018 Fall Municipal Law Conference
October 18, 2018 - Orange Beach

Training - Municipal Intercept Services
December 5, 2018 - Montgomery

*CMO Credit Available. For additional details and updates for the events, check the "League Calendar" at www.alalm.org.

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When, and how often, will municipalities receive a state payout from the local assessment fee paid by TNCs?

Reports and payments are divided up into calendar quarters. Every three months, each TNC will submit a report to the PSC listing the percentage of the gross trip fare that originated in each municipality. Each TNC is also required to submit to the PSC the total local assessment fee collected during the calendar quarter. The PSC will distribute the local assessment fees no later than 60 days after the end of each calendar quarter. The calendar quarters are as follows:

1st Quarter: January 1 – March 31
2nd Quarter: April 1- June 30
3rd Quarter: July 1 – September 30
4th Quarter: October 1 – December 31

Are drivers' tips and port authority fees included in the local assessment fee?

No. The PSC determined that drivers' tips are a type of additional fee, which the statutory definition excludes from the calculation of gross trip fare. Port authority fees are a type of venue fee which are also explicitly excluded from gross trip fare.

How can municipalities get documentation to prove how much a TNC owes and if they are paid correctly?

It depends. A municipality can request to review TNC fee documents *only* if it enacted a TNC ordinance prior to January 1, 2018 and permitted at least one TNC to operate in the municipality prior to January 1, 2018. No more than once every two years, the PSC may request a TNC to hire a third party auditor to verify the correctness of local assessment fees. The audit is limited to two calendar quarters. If a municipality enacted a TNC ordinance prior to January 1, 2018, and permitted at least one TNC to operate prior to January 1, 2018, it may request the PSC to review that portion of a third party audit applicable to the municipality. If no third party audit is available, the municipality can request the PSC to initiate an audit request. Any record maintained by a TNC or submitted to the PSC is considered confidential under the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights.

May a municipality prohibit TNCs from providing rides originating in its corporate limits?

Yes. The Act does not prohibit the municipal governing body from passing an ordinance to prohibit TNCs from providing prearranged rides originating within its municipal corporate limits.

May a municipality assess additional requirements, taxes or licenses to TNCs?

No. Only the PSC has authority to issue permits, assess fees and implement regulations.

What type of trade signage does a TNC vehicle need to display?

A TNC is required to create a uniform logo, insignia, or decal, known as a trade dress, for use on all motor vehicles used by the drivers. The trade dress must be readable from fifty feet during daylight hours. It must also be reflective or illuminated so that it is recognizable at night. The trade dress can either be magnetic or removable. It must be prominently displayed while the TNC driver is logged into the TNC network.

What type of vehicles are included as TNC vehicles?

All types of vehicles are included as TNC vehicles as long as it is used by a TNC driver and is owned, leased, or authorized for use by the TNC driver. Before a TNC driver first uses a vehicle to provide TNC services, the vehicle must get a safety inspection by a certified mechanic or by a mechanic who is under the supervision of a certified mechanic. A TNC driver's vehicle must get an annual inspection. A TNC driver cannot use a vehicle that is more than 15 years old. A vehicle is considered to be 15 years old on June 30th of the fifteen year.

What information must a TNC show about the TNC driver prior to the prearranged ride?

A TNC's digital network, such as a website or smart phone application, must display a clear facial photo of the driver, the driver's first name, as well as the make, model and license plate of the TNC vehicle before the rider enters the vehicle.

What type of safeguards are there for riders?

The Act and PSC rules require TNCs to establish and enforce a zero tolerance intoxicating substance policy for TNC drivers and allow riders the means to make a complaint about a suspected violation of the policy. The TNC must also adopt a policy of nondiscrimination against riders or potential riders who are protected by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990. The Act also requires the TNC to conduct a local and national criminal background check for each applicant. The TNC driver must be at least 19 years old and must maintain proof of automobile insurance. The Act makes it a criminal misdemeanor to impersonate a TNC driver.

How can a person make a complaint against a TNC or a TNC driver?

A person may informally contact the Utility Enforcement Division of the PSC to resolve issues with any regulated aspect of services provided by TNCs or TNC drivers. A person may also file a formal complaint in writing with the Secretary of the PSC in a manner complaint with Rule 9 of the Commission's Rules of Practice. The PSC strongly encourages the informal complaint process prior to the filing of more legally stringent formal complaints. ■

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are sparsely populated, they lack a critical mass of taxpayers, leadership, financial capacity, infrastructure and skilled labor. Therefore, if small towns are to survive, they must join forces and work together. Small towns must learn to see their neighboring community as a competitor only for the Friday night football game. And while some regions may be entirely rural, we need to also create new economic regions that link rural areas with a metro hub.

Conclusion

Small towns, and larger jurisdictions for that matter, are best served by a holistic approach to economic development. Industrial development may be an appropriate strategy, especially if done in partnership with regional neighbors; however, it should not be the *only* strategy – entrepreneurship, existing business support, tourism, retail and retiree attraction should be part of the mix. To be successful, small towns need to cultivate strong and diverse community leadership that is inclusive, collaborative and aligned. They need innovative strategies to ensure first-class education and quality public services, a strong health care sector, state-of-the-industry workforce training and citizen involvement. They need to identify their unique assets, create and implement a strategic plan and establish partnerships with other jurisdictions. And they need to be proactive in creating community and regional crossroads – organizations or structures where leaders can connect on a regular basis to assess, plan and work together.

If small towns aggressively pursue these strategies, they have excellent potential for success. Many city-dwellers long for what people in small towns already have, and often take for granted – a slower pace of life, friendly people who know their neighbors, attractive open spaces and beautiful scenery, quaint shops, historic homes and buildings, parades, festivals and streets that are safe and free of traffic congestion. Many of our small towns still possess a sense of authenticity and charm that cannot be replicated in bigger cities.

These inherent quality-of-life advantages, enhanced by strong community infrastructure – physical, human and civic – make the place more attractive to both existing and potential residents and employers. Ironically, strategies emphasizing community development ultimately make small rural towns much more attractive in the competition for those large manufacturing plants they covet. ▪

Endnotes

1. United States Department of Agriculture, National Agriculture Statistics Service, *2017 Agricultural Overview for Alabama.*
2. MDC, Inc. *The State of the South 2002: Shadows in the Sunbelt Revisited*. Chapel Hill, N.C., September 2002, p. 15.
3. Ibid.
4. U.S. Census Bureau.
5. MDC, Inc., p. 33.
6. David Mathews. "The Little Republics of American Democracy, *Connections* 13(2) (March 2003): 2-6. The quotation is from page 6.

Dr. Joe A. Sumners is Executive Director of the Government & Economic Development Institute at Auburn University (www.auburn.edu/gedi). Before joining GEDI in 2015, he served for 15 years as Director of the Auburn University Economic & Community Development Institute (ECDI) and seven years as Training Director for the Auburn University Center for Governmental Services (CGS). Dr. Sumners directs the Auburn University Intensive Economic Development Training Course and is a member of the Auburn University graduate faculty and teaches the graduate seminar, "Economic Development and Competition," as the core course in the University's Graduate Minor in Economic Development. He is the author of numerous publications on the topic of rural economic and community development, including Beyond the Interstate: The Crisis in Rural Alabama *(January 2003) and* Crossroads and Connections: Strategies for Rural Alabama *(October 2004). He wrote the chapter, "Politics and Economic Development in the Southern Black Belt," for the* Oxford Handbook of Southern Politics *(Oxford University Press, 2012). He has coordinated a multi-year Kettering Foundation research project in Alabama's Black Belt and published articles that focus on the link between civic engagement and community economic prosperity. He authored the publication,* Community Questions: Engaging Citizens to Address Community Concerns. *Dr. Sumners has over 30 years of outreach experience working with communities and local governments in Alabama, with extensive experience assisting communities with strategic planning and civic engagement initiatives. He served as a technical advisor to the Alabama Commission on Tax and Fiscal Policy Reform, Alabama Task Force on Economically Distressed Counties, Alabama Black Belt Action Commission, Alabama Rural Action Commission, Alabama Small Business Task Force; is a founding Board member of the Alabama Communities of Excellence Program; and serves on the Board of Directors for the David Mathews Center for Civic Life and Main Street Alabama. He can be reached at sumneja@auburn.edu.*

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to state GDP (gross domestic product). Both urban and rural areas contribute to states' economies. Alabama is listed as having more rural than urban prosperity growth.

These findings, Ms. McFarland states, indicate that, "One consistent theme is the importance of infrastructure connectivity and market access, indicating that sustainable growth hinges on the *connectedness of places*, not necessarily their designation as urban or rural."

This sense of regionalism is missing from much of today's dialogue on the division between rural and urban communities. Statistics are presented in a way that emphasizes those divisions and let's face it – differences generally get better press coverage. But even defining the difference between urban and rural areas is difficult. The Census Bureau has revised its definitions of "rural" and "urban" numerous times, resulting in more areas that were previously considered rural being defined as urban. The Census Bureau recognizes that "densely settled communities outside the boundaries of large incorporated municipalities were just as 'urban' as the densely settled population inside those boundaries." The Census definition does not follow city or county boundaries, so it is often difficult to determine whether a particular area is considered urban or rural.

Using this definition, the Health Resources and Services Administration reports that "about 21% of the US population in 2000 was considered rural but more than 95% of the land area was classified as rural. In the 2010 Census, 59.5 million people, 19.3% of the population, was rural while more than 95% of the land area is still classified as rural." Further, according to a report from the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Alabama, the perceived increase in urban population in Alabama may be somewhat misleading, at least in our state. The report notes that even the most densely-settled population counties have some rural population.

Finally, the increase in urban population is not a new phenomenon. The first time census figures indicated that more Americans lived in urban centers as opposed to rural areas was 1920, when 51% lived in urban areas. Since then, there has been a relatively steady increase in the percentage of citizens residing in urban areas over their rural counterparts.

Despite this, we cannot ignore the fact that far more citizens now live in urban areas and that this has implications for the future.

What does this mean for urban and rural municipalities? First, there is a growing dialogue indicating that there is widening gap between opportunities between rural and urban dwellers. Many of these factors are very real and hard to ignore. They are often cited as reasons for the growth of larger urban centers – more available jobs, convenience, access to health care and other reasons have contributed to urban expansion.

This issue of the *Alabama Municipal Journal* is devoted to the challenges and opportunities within Alabama's rural areas. Rural areas must address problems common to all municipal governments, but in some cases, the problem may be more acute in rural areas. For instance, those living in rural households are usually older than those in urban households, with average ages of 54 and 49, respectively. The aging rural population will present growing needs for health care and senior care that must be addressed by local communities.

The United States Department of Agriculture reports that job growth in rural areas since the 2008 Recession has lagged behind growth in urban areas. The move toward a service-based economy that has created jobs in urban centers has been slower in rural areas. The majority of rural jobs are now in just three service sector industries: education and health (25 percent); trade, transportation, and utilities (20 percent); and leisure and hospitality (11 percent). Because service-based jobs depend on local demand, the slower rate of growth is tied to lower population growth in rural areas.

There is some reason for optimism, though. This same report notes that manufacturing jobs in rural areas grew faster than expected. Similarly, rural municipalities offer their own set of benefits and opportunities. For instance, the U.S. Census Bureau reports that nationally rural Americans generally have lower median household incomes than urban households. Presented alone, that statistic could be alarming.

Looking behind the numbers, though, you will find that in 2011, the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE), reported that the cost of living in rural areas is often less than the cost of living in urban areas. The report notes that those in urban households spent $7,808 (18 percent) more than those living in rural households.

Another factor is poverty. While the statistics are complex, the Census Bureau reports in "A Comparison of Rural and Urban America: Household Income and Poverty" that poverty levels are lower in rural communities, with 16 percent of urban dwellers living below official poverty thresholds compared to 13.3 percent of their rural counterparts.

Lifestyle is often cited by those who choose to live in rural areas. People who live in rural areas are more likely to own their own homes, live in their state of birth and have served in the military than their urban counterparts. There is often more of a perceived sense of connectedness and community.

The Alabama League has urban members and rural members. Our governing body is made up of municipalities ranging in population from 510 to over 200,000. Finding a common, unified voice requires an awareness not only of similar issues shared by all of our members, regardless of population, it also requires us to be able to identify issues that affect different-sized municipalities and working to find solutions to any identified concerns. We look forward to continuing the dialogue between urban and rural areas and helping bridge the gaps between them. ■

On-Line Retailers and the Collection of Sales/Use Taxes

Lorelei Lein • General Counsel • ALM

On June 21, 2018, the United States Supreme Court ruled that states and local governments can require vendors with no physical presence in the state to collect sales tax in certain circumstances. *South Dakota v. Wayfair*, 138 S.Ct. 2080 (2018). As was discussed in detail in the "Legal Viewpoint" in the June/July edition of *The Municipal Journal*, since 1967 the Court has maintained that in order to require an out of state vendor to collect and remit sales taxes, they must have some physical presence in the state. *See National Bellas Hess, Inc. v. Department of Revenue of State of Ill.*, 386 U.S. 753, 87 S.Ct. 1389, (1967); *Quill Corp. v. North Dakota,* 502 U.S. 808, 112 S.Ct. 49, (1992). In a 5-4 decision, the Court concluded that Wayfair's "economic and virtual contacts" with South Dakota are enough to create a "substantial nexus" with the state allowing it to require collection and remittance.

Before state and local governments rush to start requiring collection of sales taxes, it's important to understand that although *Wayfair* overturned long standing precedent, it is not without Commerce Clause limitations. In 1977, in *Complete Auto Transit v. Brady,* the Supreme Court held that interstate taxes may only apply to an activity with a "substantial nexus" with the taxing State in order to be constitutional. So, while physical presence is no longer required, the "substantial nexus" requirement remains. In *Wayfair*, the Court found a "substantial nexus" because, in its view, a business could not do $100,000 worth of sales or 200 separate transactions in South Dakota "unless the seller availed itself of the substantial privilege of carrying on business in South Dakota."

The Court acknowledged that questions remain about whether other commerce clause principals might "invalidate" South Dakota's law. Ideally, the Court would have said that South Dakota's law is constitutional in every respect and that if a state passes a law exactly like South Dakota's, it will pass constitutional muster; however, it didn't do that. Instead, the Court cited three features of South Dakota's tax system that "appear designed to prevent discrimination against or undue burdens upon interstate commerce. First, the Act applies a safe harbor to those who transact only limited business in South Dakota. Second, the Act ensures that no obligation to remit the sales tax may be applied retroactively. Third, South Dakota is one of more than 20 States that have adopted the Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Agreement."

The months ahead will tell the story of how Alabama will proceed in light of the *Wayfair* decision. In 2016, the Alabama Department of Revenue (ADOR) passed a rule

providing that "economic nexus" exists for any Seller delivering more than $250K in goods to Alabama in a year and is therefore required to collect and remit sales/use tax. The rule was never enforced because it conflicted with *Quill's* physical presence requirement. Following *Wayfair*, ADOR is directing sellers with "economic nexus" to start collecting and remitting sales/use tax on or after October 1, 2018, through the provisions of Sections 40-23-191 et seq., Code of Alabama 1975 (SSUT). As most of you are aware, there are significant issues that remain for municipalities under the SSUT such as amount to be collected and the fairest way to distribute the portion going to local governments. Those issues will have to be addressed legislatively. The League will continue to follow this issue and update our members accordingly. ■

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Committee on Human Development (HD). HD reviews and develops policy on social service and educational issues affecting municipalities. The Committee also reviews ways municipalities may improve the local environment for health care, mental health programs, juvenile and senior citizen programs, developing training and employment opportunities, welfare reform and Medicare and Medicaid programs.

Committee on Community and Economic Development (CED). CED reviews and develops policy on factors affecting the physical development of cities and towns, including community, industrial and economic development; tourism and recreation; housing; planning and zoning; code enforcement; enterprise zone development and regulation; and downtown redevelopment.

When do the Policy Committees meet?

Policy Committees meet once a year, typically during the Spring. This is done in conjunction with the legislative session so members of each committee have an opportunity at the end of the program to walk over to the State House and visit with their legislative delegations.

How do I sign up to volunteer on a Committee?

To be placed on a policy committee, email Kayla Farnon, Advocacy Communications Coordinator, at **kaylaf@alalm.org**. Please specify your name, title and what committee you have an interest in serving on.

How long are Policy Committee appointments?

The Chair and Vice Chair of each committee are elected by the membership during the Annual Business Session at the League's Convention. Typically, they serve two-year terms. Committee members are assigned to serve specific committees by the committee Chair and Executive Director. Assignments are reevaluated yearly. If committee members have been active and wish to remain on their current committees, no changes are made.

Final Thoughts

I've always considered it a great honor to be part of the decision-making process for our organization through service on a League policy committee. I extend my gratitude to our committee chairs and vice chairs as well as those of you currently serving on a policy committee. If you're not already on a committee, I urge you to reach out to Kayla and become involved. Please mark your calendars for the 2019 committee meetings that will be held at League Headquarters in Montgomery this March and April and plan to spend the entire day working to better the future of our League and our municipalities! ▪

Congratulations to MIS for surpassing the $2 MILLION mark!

$ 2,004,207.29 has been recovered on behalf of our member entities as of July 31, 2018

MIS is NOT a debt collection agency or service. It is a unique way to attempt to recover money owed to your municipality by "intercepting" an individual's Alabama State tax refund. Debt collection agencies can NOT offer you this service. **MIS is Alabama's only state tax refund municipal debt recovery program.** MIS is a legislatively sanctioned conduit with the Alabama Department of Revenue (ADOR) that enables ADOR to recover delinquent debts owed by individuals to your municipality by collecting this debt from the individual's Alabama state tax refund.

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