

**MINUTES OF THE BLACK BELT COMMISSION  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING**

**April 9, 2013**

**Judson College - Marion, AL**

The Black Belt Commission Executive Committee met Tuesday, April 9, 2013, at Judson College in Marion, Alabama with Dr. David Potts, President of Judson College, hosting the meeting. The following were in attendance:

Ron Sparks, Director, Alabama Rural Development Office  
Mayor Sheldon Day, Co-Chair  
Dr. Daniel Boyd, Chair, Education Committee  
John Zippert, Chair, Agriculture Committee  
Dr. Carol Zippert, Chair, Cultural and Youth Committee  
Chad Nichols, Co-Chair, Health Committee  
Shirley Worthington, Chair, Transportation Committee  
Tyson Howard, South Central Alabama Regional Commission  
Carolyn Powell, Liaison, Congresswoman Terri Sewell's Office  
Ginger Rue Stewart, Project Manager  
Thomas Moore, Project Manager  
Candy Capel, Project Manager  
Emily Law, BBC Executive Director  
Dave Dagastino, Black Belt Community Foundation  
Sheila Hall, Davita Dialysis, Asst. Facility Administrator  
Frances Ford, Sowing Seeds of Hope

**Mayor Sheldon Day, Co-Chair**, welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order. Ron thanked Judson College and Dr. Potts for hosting the meeting and thanked he and Frances Ford for having the vision and the tenacity to see the Dialysis project to completion.

**Dr. David Potts, President of Judson College** addressed the Executive Board and welcomed everyone to Judson College and Marion. He acknowledged the critical role the Black Belt Commission played in getting the dialysis center in Marion and Perry county.

**Sheldon** recognized and introduced **Frances Ford, Sowing Seeds of Hope**, and Sheila Hall who works at the Dialysis Center. They both spoke about the process of getting the dialysis center up and running and the present operation of the center. **Frances Ford** reported that dialysis began on April 3<sup>rd</sup> with 25 dialysis patients. They invited everyone to come visit the center after the meeting.

**Ron** told them to feel free to call his office if there is anything we can do to help. **Ms. Frances** reiterated the fact that there is no health care available in Perry County after 5 o'clock. An urgent care unit is needed for the area. This might become a future project.

**Shirley** asked about transportation to the dialysis center. **Ms. Frances** reported that West Alabama public transportation had worked out wonderfully.

**John Zippert** – Asked about estimate of how many of the patients are on Medicaid. **Ms. Ford** stated it was the vast majority of patients. He stated the Governor has not extended Medicaid so we need to act on this and get the Governor to reconsider.

**Ron Sparks, ARDO Director**, gave his comments:

- Talked about the Dialysis Center opening in Perry County and thanked **Frances Ford, Chad and Dr. Potts** for all they did to see this project to completion.
- Talked about Lowndes County getting a dialysis center next.
- Discussed the World's Widest Yard Sale Project May 31 – June 2, 2013. We are growing the yard sale this year to include all of the Black Belt area and beyond.
- Gave update on Telehealth in this state stating he continues to work on telemedicine in various ways.
- Talked about the Strikeforce Initiative in Alabama organized by Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack. This initiative addresses critical needs in persistent poverty areas.
- Active in thirteen states: Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, south Carolina, South Dakota and Virginia.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

**AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE – John Zippert, Chair, reported –**

- Continuing to work on the major project, the Fruit and Vegetable Marketing Center that is to be built on Highway 80 as a marketing outlet for farmers.
- Plan to sell to Walmart, Bell's Foods, Whole Foods and Fresh Market are some of the outlets for products.
- The architect is reworking plans for building. Should be ready by December or early next year.
- Currently working on two additional projects: One that deals with selling beef cattle in lots to get a better price and exploring possible ways to use small timber left from disasters.

**Tyson** commended **John and Candy** for their work on this project.

**COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE – Dr. David Hale, Chair, Ginger Rue. Project Manager, reported –**

- No report of new activity. Committee continues existing projects as follows:
- The committee continues to aid the State's Broadband Initiative in developing and disseminating performance metrics. This includes the development of a
  - A new web-based dashboard displaying the demand, and service availability.

- Integrating results from community based broadband projects within each of the State's ten broadband regions, and
- Creating an economic build-out impact model that incorporates cost, and demand based on healthcare, public safety, education and commercial impact.
- The committee continues to assist the Veteran's Administration Hospital in Tuscaloosa reach out to Vets in the Black Belt to gain access to care through the VA Mobile Care Unit. The goal is to increase the number of vets who make use of their medical benefits for which they are entitled. Traditionally, less than 40% of those vets that are eligible for medical assistance are taking advantage of the services.
- The committee assisted by the University of Alabama has developed the Alabama Bird Trail mobile Ipad App. This app allows birders to have access to bird, bird trail, and local business (such as restaurant, lodging, gas station) information while in the field, not connected to the internet.

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE - Felecia Jones, Chair, Thomas Moore, Program Manager-**

- Committee met February 26, 2013 in Livingston.
- Will place focus on recruiting new members and secure commitment of current members.
- The committee will work to develop an enhanced leadership program for leaders in rural small cities and towns.
- To initiate project, a meeting will be scheduled with the mayors of some of the rural cities and towns in the Black Belt.
- The goal is to meet once a quarter.

**CULTURAL AND YOUTH – Dr. Carol Zippert, Chair, Thomas Moore, Project Manager, reported –**

- In process of scheduling grant workshops in all twelve counties.
- This is funding is for community-based arts projects.
- One criteria is grantee should be community focused.
- There are several festivals in the Black Belt each year and some of the funds help with these.
- Plan to make a database of festivals.

**EDUCATION COMMITTEE – Dr. Daniel Boyd, Chair, Ginger Rue, Project Manager, reported-**

- One scholarship (\$500 value) has been set aside by the University of Alabama's College of Engineering on behalf of the BBC's Education committee. This will allow a Black Belt high school rising junior or senior to attend the week-long Student Introduction to Engineering Program.
- Applications will be distributed to Superintendents later this month.
- Also working on education summit this June 3 and 4 in Montgomery. Participants can attend free from Lowndes, Butler and Dallas counties.

- Dr. Boyd distributed analysis of survey instrument superintendents completed. This helps determine which topics to address at the summit. (See Attached Survey of Needs)

**Carol** stated that we should encourage school systems to utilize art programs in schools in different subjects. They are more likely to pay attention and get leaders to buy in. You will see public education change.

**FAMILIES COMMITTEE – Dr. Nick Stinnett, Chair – Ginger Rue, Project Manager:**

- No report.

**HEALTH COMMITTEE — Congresswoman Terri Sewell and Chad Nichols, Co-Chairs, reported:**

- Talked about the dialysis center in Perry County and the one that's coming to Lowndes County.
- Discussed partnering with Judson College with the KidCheck Program for public schools in Perry County.
- KidCheck is now a part of Sight Savers.
- K-4 and kids in grades 1<sup>st</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grades get vision screening.
- Got the state contract to monitor that follow up.
- There are no optometrists in Perry County. We are bringing optometrist from UAB to perform the vision screenings.
- On April 28<sup>th</sup> 100 kids that failed the screenings will receive further care at no cost to their family unless they can afford to pay.
- Most of them will receive glasses.
- Our plans are to add new KidCheck program in Hale County.
- Lowndes County has been involved since the getgo. The goal for the county is to expand the program
- Stated they had bought their own equipment and supplies for the Black Belt area that will be housed in a van Sight Savers received through a grant from Honda.
- Looks forward to building the program in years to come.
- Reported that 23,000 kids will be screened this year, 70,000 to date reaching a total of 105,000 kids by end of this year.

**Ron** urged members to attend one of the KidCheck events.

**INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE – Noopie Cosby, Chair - Thomas Moore, Program Manager, reported:**

- Noopie Cosby and Thomas met with Bea Forniss, the former chair of the Infrastructure Committee to discuss the past and future direction of the Infrastructure Committee.
- Bea is working on a DRA Entrepreneur Initiative for the Black Belt which will allow for planning grants and training grants.

- Noopie identified Black Belt issues: 1. Food, 2. Healthcare; and 3. Economic opportunities relative to defense procurement plans and 3% set asides for minorities and handicapped individuals.
- Wants to partner with the Black Belt area legislative delegation for their input and Resources.
- Committee will schedule a meeting near the latter part of May, 2013.

**MANUFACTURING COMMITTEE – George Alford, Chair, Candy Capel, Project Manager, reported-**

- **George** continues to be busy with work on the **Golden Dragon** site and several other Chinese projects in Wilcox County.

**MARKETING & TOURISM –Pam Swanner, Chair, Thomas Moore, Project Manager, reported –**

- The committee met March 14, 2013 at Alabama River Lakes Office in White Hall.
- Widest Yard Sale May 31 – June 2 was the topic of the agenda.
- A map was presented showing the counties involved in the yard sale.
- \$10,000 has been secured through a grant from the Alabama Tourism Department to assist with promotion of the project.
- There will be vendor sites set up with a contact person for each.

**SMALL BUSINESS COMMITTEE – Donald Mills, Chair, Ginger Rue, Program Manager, reported:**

- The Youth Entrepreneurial summit (YES) scheduled for April 30 and will feature guest speaker Leanna Archer of New York. She is 17 and CEO of Leanna’s Hair, Inc, a haircare products line. She earns six figures a year in profit and has founded her own charity to build schools in Haiti.
- A committee conference call is scheduled tomorrow April 10<sup>th</sup>.
- Project READY Workforce Training seminar hosted by Congresswoman Sewell will be April 29 at UWA.

**SKILLS TRAINING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT – Dr. James Mitchell, Chair, Candy Cappel, Project Manager, reported-**

- No report

**TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE – Shirley Worthington, Chair – Candy Capel, Project Manager, reported -**

- She was pleased to hear the reports about available transportation for the dialysis center.
- Offered assistance from United Way of Alabama.

**REGIONAL COUNCIL REPORTS:**

**John Clyde Riggs, Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission: (Absent)**

**Tyson Howard, South Central Alabama Development Commission:**

- Reported his office is extremely busy writing applications for economic development and planning grants.
- Over the last six months, sister agencies have gone to Sen. Orr and Rep. Barton regarding the change in funding format on how meals are served in the Black Belt. They want to base means on population based scenario.
- This will mean a loss of 133,000 to 400,000 meals.
- Rep. Steve Close sent support letter to us.
- Neal Morrison wants to do a formula to determine meals.
- We have made everyone aware of this.

**Bob Lake, West Alabama Regional Commission: (Absent)**

**William Scott** reported that it's been one year since he opened his virtual office business and he has about 100 clients

**Ron** gave closing remarks before the meeting adjourned for a delicious lunch provided by Judson College and Dr. David Potts. Everyone was urged to go by the Dialysis Center after lunch.