

**MINUTES OF THE BLACK BELT COMMISSION
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
Federation Rural Training and Research Center
October 8, 2013**

The Black Belt Commission Executive Committee met Tuesday, October 8, 2013 at The Federation Rural Training and Research Center in Epes, Alabama with John Zippert hosting the meeting. The following were in attendance:

Ron Sparks, Director, Alabama Rural Development Office
John Zippert, Chair, Agriculture Committee
Donald Mills, Chair, Small Business Committee
Dr. David Hale, Chair, Communications Committee
Dr. Carol Zippert, Chair, Cultural and Youth
Shirley Worthington, Chair, Transportation Committee
Dave Dagostino, Chair, Families Committee
Tyson Howard, South Central Alabama Regional Commission
Bob Lake, West Alabama Regional Development Council
Ginger Stewart, Project Manager
Candy Capel, Project Manager
Thomas Moore, Project Manager
Emily Law, BBC Executive Director
Mr. John Huffman, ADOT, Guest of Donald Mills
Alicia Logan, West Central Alabama AHEC
Art Clawson, Statewide AHEC Coordinator

Ron Sparks, welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order. He then recognized **John Zippert**, host of the meeting. John reminded everyone they were now in rural Alabama.

Ron Sparks stated he is on the AHEC Board and had recently met with them in Birmingham. He talked about the work being done statewide and regionally. AHEC has been around since 1971. He talked about the program's history and how it got to this point. He then introduced Alicia M. Logan, Coordinator of West Central Alabama AHEC and Art Clawson, Statewide AHEC Program. The program serves thirteen counties. Looking for community leaders and academia to participate. AHEC will promote the Rural Scholars Program. It's all about maintaining partnerships among those involved.

Alicia Logan spoke about the West Central AHEC Program, which provides services and activities that support health careers promotion, student and resident experiential education, community health awareness and professional continuing education within the West Central Alabama AHEC 13-county service area. The West Central AHEC program is seeking healthcare providers, clinical sites, academic institutions and community organizations to participate in programs and activities.

Art Clawson, Statewide AHEC Director, talked about the background and goals of AHEC which are as follows:

- **Develop** a sustainable Alabama Statewide AHEC Program that covers all 67 counties of the state with five community-based AHEC Centers.
- To **implement programs**, services and activities that target underrepresented minority, rural and other disadvantaged Alabamians for careers in the health professions.
- **Influence** the training of health professions students/resident toward primary care through rotations with Alabama's medically needy populations.
- **Improve** the health and quality of care provided to medically needy Alabamians by providing continuing education and support for targeted healthcare providers.

Art spoke about The U of A at Birmingham School of Medicine receiving a five-year, \$5.25 million grant from the federal Health Resources and Services Administration to create the AHEC Program.

UAB will establish five regional offices around the state that will address the access goal through undertaking several initiatives to increase the number of students who enter healthcare.

Alabama AHEC has many partners to insure the success of the program. Among those already committed are:

- Alabama A & M University
- Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine
- Auburn University
- Jefferson Davis Community College
- Sanford University
- Tuskegee University
- University of Alabama
- Whatley Health Services, Inc.
- University of South Alabama
-and more will follow.

AHEC equals education, jobs and access to health care.

Art stated that the plan is to look at each county and build a program based on the data. We have a history of the program since it began in 1971 as a 501© 3 non-profit program.

Mr. Huffman, Alabama Department of Transportation, talked about his centers and payment of loans. NHS provides a year for year commitment. All counties need these or it may get assigned to another state.

Ron stated that some counties are recruiting doctors, which is not as successful as growing doctors. There is a need to talk to county governments about investing in our youth. Centerville has a Rural Family Medicine Program.

Dr. Carol Zippert asked if someone would come to the highschool and do workshops. Art stated that the program is similar to Dr. Wheat's Program and yes, they will come to the highschools.. Would like to see partnerships and centers communicating with hospital.

Ron related that there are nearly \$1million medical errors made a year. With the cost of this, it's unfortunate that funds have been cut back.

Briefly as I can, I predict opportunities are going to go up. We have silos and turfs and we are now allowing nurse practitioners. Working with people like Art and Dr. Lenz, we need to be on board and to be a resource for them.

Art reported that Veterans have a program where medics can transition into the nursing program. He talked about the three centers: Region 1, West Central AL AHEC and South AL AHEC.

Tuskegee is working with Morehouse school.

Ron discussed in-home dialysis and Dr. Wallace who spoke at the Health Conference.

Co-chair Bea Forniss asked that everyone introduce themselves.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE – John Zippert, Chair, reported –

- Have not made a lot of progress on the Fruit and Vegetable Marketing Center that is to be built on Highway 80 as a marketing outlet for local farmers.
- Candy reported the pre-bid conference held on October 15th followed by sight visit within three weeks bids will be received.

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE – Dr. David Hale, Chair, Ginger Stewart.

Project Manager, Deana Watkins with the University of Alabama reported –

- ConnectingALABAMA is progressing,
- Asked for help in getting the word out about downloading the app as more data is needed.
- Almost 400 apps have been run around the state.
- Off the interstate has no data points.
- 25 and 43 down the center of the state through middle of the Black Belt is a problem area.
- **Go to www.connectingalabama.gov** in the app store and download the free app.
- Once a week, the app will test your data speed wherever you are. Performance maps will be made available for state policy makers, carriers and consumers.
- **Dr. Hale** is available to answer other questions via ALMobile@ua.edu

Ron stated that one of the saddest things that's happened is losing the \$80 million contract with Trillion - A2D. \$12 million was spent and the other had to go back to the federal level. .

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

- Current project is leadership development for elected officials.
- Held training session in August and it was quite successful.
- Goal is to empower them with ongoing leadership information.

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

- Waiting on the allocation which begins October 1st.
- The Cultural & Youth Committee is in collaboration with the Alabama State Council on the Arts and was awarded \$102,400 in grants that will be allocated to 47 community organizations.
- In process of finding a new cultural arts director for program.
- The person will need good organizational skills.
- Trying to get additional resources to go with State Council on Arts funding.

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

- No report.

FAMILIES COMMITTEE – Dave Dagostino, Chair – Ginger Stewart, Project Manager reported:

- The committee is in process of rebuilding.
- New members have been recruited.
- Talked about a starting healthy family program
- Dave Dagostino has approached current and former pro athletes who have ties to Alabama or the Black Belt specifically, Bo Jackson and Charles Barkley, who have their own foundations.
- Potential source for both funds and publicity.

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

- No report given. No one present from committee.

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

- The committee had scheduled a meeting for September 26th, but due to speakers not being able to attend, the meeting was cancelled by Chairman.
- Committee has three planned projects:

1. Securing funding for dredging of Alabama River through a partnership with Alabama-Tombigbee Water Association.
 2. Securing one of eight space pods authorized in the U.S.
 3. Organizing the Black Belt Caucus with assistance of Senator Beasley.
- Committee will schedule its next meeting for late Nov. or early December, 2013.

MANUFACTURING COMMITTEE – David Hooks, Chair, Candy Capel, Project Manager, reported-

- Candy reported that we do have someone who has taken the Chairmanship of the committee. Mr. David Hooks, Ron, Emily and I had meeting and discussed future of the committee.
- David's wife had surgery and he could not be present today.

MARKETING & TOURISM –Mary Catherine Bargainier/Wimberly Comer, Co-Chairs – Thomas Moore, Project Manager, reported –

- The M and T Committee meeting is scheduled for November 5th to discuss the roll-out of the Yard Sale plans scheduled for April 18-19, 2014.
- Heritage Area Legislation: continues to move toward national designation. A delegation was in DC last week to push the bills introduced in the House and Senate.
- Several Black Belt sites (Thomasville, Old Cahawba, Selma) are hosting ghost tours during the month of October.
- Committee will create a monthly regional e-newsletter to be distributed to announce regional events and tourism/community development projects throughout the Black Belt. Goal is to send the first one this month.
- A regional marketing initiative is taking place to better understand who are current and potential visitors and what the region can do to better market to potential visitors.
- The Heritage area is working with local communities to create audio tours that visitors can call into or see on their smartphone or internet. Current tours are in Sumter, Lowndesboro, Camden and Old Cahawba. Tours have been completed in Marion.
- The Heritage Area, Black Belt Community Foundation and Judson College have been working on interpretive panels for Perry Lakes Park in Marion. There will be an unveiling on Thursday, October 17. Everyone is invited.
- Committee is being established to move forward with identifying sites for the Black Belt birding Trail.
- Conducting a meeting with the tour operator for a potential Alabama River cruise to discuss how committee can assist with developing the tour and promoting.

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

- The committee held a conference call on September 17.
- The **Home Grown Small Business Conference** with emphasis on Farming and Agri-Business has been postponed and is now tentatively set for April.

- Farmers in Black Belt are on average in their 60s and 70s, a youth component will be included in the conference. There will also be a component on technology farmers can use.
- Hajj Flemings presented recently at UWA, speaking to three classes and holding an evening session.
- Interagency forum was held in August (Press release was distributed).
- The ALDOT Small Business Procurement conference will be October 28-30.
- Mr. John Huffman with ALDOT and guest of Don Mills, presented more information about the procurement conference shortly following Donald Mills' report.
- ALDOT has new program called the Small Business Element Program and it is designed to promote small businesses doing business with the department of Transportation.
- Some projects now on the radar from the DOT include widening Hwy 423 and there could be contracting opportunities for small businesses in the area.
- The Small business Procurement Conference will be held October 28-30, 2013 at the renaissance Riverview Hotel in Mobile, AL
- Attendees will gain exposure to leading construction and manufacturing industry representatives...
- Develop a strategy for obtaining access to federal, state, city, county and private sector contracts...
- Receive information from government and private sector representatives...
- Meet one on one with procurement officers to market firm's goods and services...
- Offers networking opportunities with other small business owners in attendance.

SKILLS TRAINING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT – Ed Castile Chair, Dr. Ken Tucker, Co-Chair, Candy Cappel, Project Manager, reported-

- Mr. Ed Castile has agreed to Chair committee along with Dr. Ken Tucker as Co-chair.

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

- Thanked Ginger, Bobby Armistead for raising awareness
- Thanked Carolyn for assisting Ken Phillips and arranging radio presentation for him. The radio presentation got a lot of talk.
- Stated as you work in your center, if transportation is an issue, please let her know.
- Reported that the submitted veteran support grant is up and running.
- Focused on Black Belt Rural Veterans Coordination Pilot.
- Partnering with AHEC.

REGIONAL COUNCIL REPORTS:

John Clyde Riggs, Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission: Absent

Tyson Howard, South Central Alabama Development Commission reported:

- He was glad to be present.
- Reported that Senator Orr's funding formula had been upheld and went into effect October 1st.
- Plans are to go to court; have meeting set to determine what's going to happen

Bob Lake, West Alabama Regional Council:

- Thanked Ginger Stewart for presentation to Board members.
- Grant approved for Gordo \$322,000 in Greene County.
- Have job openings for social workers.
- Have experience in social work or closely related field.
- Ran ad in Tuscaloosa News. Need figures on projects.
- State of Alabama Economic Development will be administered \$81,000 to \$106,000 Economic Development grant writing call my office.

Carol Zippert reported that the credit union in Greene County that has been recognized since 1985 is getting resources to get store front redone. To so many, the institution is significant for training and development. She reported they had someone to sponsor signage. The Credit Union provided training programs for young folks. They are instructed how to operate a credit union.

Ron gave closing remarks and the meeting adjourned for a delicious lunch provided by John Zippert and the **Federation Rural Training and Research Center**. .