

Leadership Anyone?

Leadership anyone? The topic is foremost in my mind because I am writing this in Huntsville during a wonderful leadership conference hosted by Extension, the Alabama Community Leadership Network and Leadership Huntsville-Madison County. Many wonderful speakers have shared great planning materials and outstanding ideas, as that is one of the components of successful leadership. Since we're trying to establish a leadership program in Bibb County I felt this was a good time to share an interesting insight relative to our county.

Dr. Joe Sumners, a colleague with Extension/Auburn University's Institute of Economic and Community Development (ECDI), gave a lively presentation of the past, present and future of Alabama's economy. He emphasized what's needed to develop Alabama's rural economies in the 21st Century. ECDI hosted several roundtables a few years ago with rural leaders---and Bibb was among them---to find out how ECDI could address the economic plight of rural Alabama. The rural leaders identified, in order of priority, leadership, workforce development, and technology infrastructure as the keys to economic development. Therefore, it's no accident that the Bibb County Chamber of Commerce received a \$16,500 grant this year for leadership. It is very important that Bibb County implement this grant as a building block for developing its workforce and technology infrastructure. Stay tuned for further details on our upcoming leadership program, as changes are in the offing.

Anyway, Dr. Sumners shared an interesting analogy on how we can set and achieve our goals. Dr. Sumners described a struggle between giant and a weakling (i.e, David and Goliath) and cited in his analogy a 19th Century political scientist named Schottschneider. Now let's say hypothetically that impoverished, rural Bibb is the weakling and urban, prospering Birmingham is the giant. According to Schottschneider's philosophy, the weakling can gain leverage by "expanding the scope of conflict." In other words, that means partnering in numbers with each other within the county, and throughout the region, to enhance our economic and political influence statewide improve our lot. I look forward to working with county and regional leaders on partnerships to enhance leadership, tourism and technology infrastructure, all of which are important building blocks to economic development. And you don't have to be a leader to help. Simply picking up trash in your yard and along the highways goes a long way to give visitors and passers-through a better impression of Bibb County, thereby aiding economic development. As Bob the Builder refrain goes, "Can we do it?" Yes, we can!

I want to close by acknowledging a couple of hard working local groups and their accomplishments. First, there's the cleanup of the old Bibb County Jail in Centreville a couple of weeks ago by the Better Hometown Group---Bill Hubbard, Linda Renn and Judy Herron just to name a few. Now there's still a lot left to do, but we got a lot done---removing tiles and light fixtures from the ceiling, appliances and other debris. It is the noble dream of the Group to utilize the old jail someday as a meeting facility, museum, office spaces, and I look forward to helping them make the dream to come true. Another dream also came true---that of Jimmy Jones and visionary folks at Six Mile. They have

turned what was a garbage dump two years ago into a beautiful community park. You'll see elsewhere in the paper a ceremony was held last week, not only to celebrate the completion of the Bibb County soil map, but to celebrate a grant from the USDA's Tomigbee RC & D council for improvements to the park. And the vision does not stop there...Mr. Jones and his colleagues are planning a nature path to the nearby creek and other improvements, and I look forward to being a resource in any way desired for this endeavor as well.

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