

“Strategic Summer in Bibb County”

The “Strategic Summer In Bibb County” I mentioned a few weeks back continues to shape up. As busy as that keeps us in the Extension Office, a brief “staycation” last week---a two-hour, morning canoe float along local river rapids---offered a welcome opportunity for me to recharge, relax, reflect on what was and ponder what could be.

Given my hectic schedule of graduate work, family responsibilities and the many Extension programs we are doing, that canoe float is probably about as close as I will get to a vacation this summer. I really enjoyed the thrill of negotiating the rapids with a capable canoe partner and seeing the bounty of beautiful plants, animals and scenery the river had to offer. The highlight was seeing a kingfisher seek a late-morning brunch.

OK, I won't lie...the trip was not all smooth sailing. Such is the case with any worthwhile adventure. We capsized, which is a rite of passage for any such canoe trip! There were also a few scrapes on underwater rocks and a painful wasp sting. And, memories from my mid-late 1980s days in Bibb County came flooding back.

I recalled my oldest brother visiting so we could tackle the rapids. I was a reporter then for the Centreville Press. As it is today, crunch time was Monday, the paper was printed Tuesday, and it was issued Wednesday. So, we took our excursion on a Wednesday.

With respect to the river and rapids, much was the same in 1987 as it was last week. We capsized, got stung by wasps and endured a few scrapes from underwater rocks, but the rapids were perfect and the scenery was breathtaking.

But one thing was different last week, much to my disappointment. I spotted the identical location Will and I had launched from, and the property is overtaken in weeds and underbrush. A locked gate with a sign reading “private property” prevents entry. Only by invitation of an adjoining landowner was I able to enjoy last week's float.

True, the location was private property in the 1980s as well, but at least it operated on a seasonal basis to give the adventurous public a chance to take on the rapids. I wondered to myself, what could possibly have led to the closure of the site?

But rather than dwell too much on what was, my thoughts turned to future possibilities with respect to canoe rental. There have been several great accomplishments by the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge & Friends Group, local governments and others to increase public access to the Cahaba and Little Cahaba. These include the Refuge itself, the Piper Landing/Canoe Launch and the Bibb County Glades. Yet, there is still not a publicly accessible location that I'm aware of where someone can rent a canoe and enjoy the rapids. If I'm mistaken, maybe someone will set me straight.

After last week's float, the kickoff meeting of the Leadership Alumni Association was held. Fifteen (15) alumni gathered to discuss our leadership program and its viability. Someone noted Bibb County has assets that are well-known outside the county, yet little known from within. Others cited the need to make our own neighbors aware of our assets and get them involved.

Whether landing a canoe outfitter, improving our schools, developing infrastructure, or increasing tourism, the path begins with renewal of the Bibb County Strategic Plan. Join us Tuesday, July 21, 5pm-8pm at West Blocton Middle School and Thursday, July 30 from 5pm-8pm at Bibb County High School. Dream big, show up, and share your dreams. Let's pursue our own dreams, before others come in and do it for us.