

Action

PUBLIC ISSUE INFORMATION FOR ALABAMA CITIZENS

FROM THE EDITOR

ECDI – Economic and Community Development Institute

Two organizations with a history of assisting Alabama communities over the past several decades were the Community Resource Development unit of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and the Economic Development Institute of Auburn University. Both had similar missions and clientele and had a history of working closely together to serve Alabama's citizens. Notable examples of cooperation included the Alabama Communities of Excellence Program and assisting local communities with strategic planning projects. To make more efficient use of resources, the two were recently merged to form the **Economic and Community Development Institute**.

The Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI), a partnership of Alabama Cooperative Extension System and Auburn University, publishes "Action" once each quarter. The goal of ECDI is to help people solve community problems, take advantage of opportunities and build on their assets. To accomplish this, ECDI provides educational and technical assistance in economic development, leadership development, strategic planning and public policy education. "Action" is one tool we use to link community groups to AU and Extension's resources.

The new partnership between Auburn University and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System through the formation of the **Economic and Community Development Institute** is the focus of this issue of "Action." Joe Sumners, ECDI director, is the coordinator for this issue.

The next issue of "Action," Spring 2007, will highlight new Extension's new Rural Alabama Initiative. For more information on these topics or to make suggestions for additional topics, contact the editor by calling (334) 844-3517, faxing (334) 844-9022 or e-mailing chesnjt@auburn.edu.

J. Thomas Chesnutt
Editor
Extension Tourism Specialist

ECDI – Economic and Community Development Institute

Auburn University and Extension Partner to Create ECDI

In May 2006, Auburn University Outreach and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System joined forces to create the Economic and Community Development Institute. ECDI combines the staff of the former AU Economic Development Institute (EDI) with staff from the former Extension Community Resource Development unit.

For many years, EDI and CRD have shared common goals and objectives, including leadership development, developing community capacity and strategic planning. These two entities have partnered on many projects and activities, including the very successful Auburn University Intensive Economic Development Training Course. The creation of ECDI enables AU and Extension to better utilize their resources and to more effectively meet the needs of the citizens of Alabama, especially in the rural parts of the state.

ECDI Staff

Joe A. Sumners, the director of the former EDI, serves as the director of ECDI, providing leadership for economic and community development programming for both Extension and Auburn University. He serves as an outreach director and as Extension state program leader for Economic and Community Development.



Thomas Chesnutt, Extension tourism specialist (formerly of CRD), is a specialist in the areas of tourism, agritourism and retiree attraction.

Mike Easterwood, senior outreach associate (formerly of EDI), has expertise in policy research, grant writing and strategic planning.

Amelia Stehouwer, training and research associate (formerly of EDI), has expertise in education/training program development, community development and civic engagement.

Arturo S. Menefee recently joined ECDI as an Extension leadership development specialist. Menefee has expertise in community, economic, health and nonprofit development.

Markie Southerland serves as executive assistant (formerly of EDI).

During spring 2007, ECDI plans to hire a new economic and community development specialist.

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In addition to these statewide specialists, Extension also allocates 25 percent of the time of each of the three Extension district directors and a minimum of 10 percent of the time of each of the 67 county Extension coordinators to the Economic and Community Development program area.

ECDI Vision and Goals

ECDI's vision is to become the state's preeminent change agent for positive economic and community development policy and practice. ECDI seeks to play a leading role in revitalizing Alabama's communities, especially in the state's rural areas. ECDI has four primary service areas and goals:

- 1. Community outreach and engagement.** "Help build and strengthen economic and community capacity in Alabama communities through: (a) leadership development, (b) civic engagement, (c) strategic planning and (d) economic development."
- 2. Education.** "Improve the practice of economic and community development in Alabama through targeted educational programs."
- 3. Research.** "Conduct research and disseminate research findings on issues related to economic and community development in Alabama."
- 4. Communication, connections and partnerships.** "Provide relevant information to –and facilitate communication, coordination and partnerships among – Alabama's economic and community development practitioners, Extension and Auburn University."

ECDI Programs and Activities

1. Community outreach and engagement.

Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) program. ECDI is partnering with other educational institutions, state agencies, nonprofit organizations and private sector corporations to help build the capacity of Alabama's small towns (with populations between 2,000 and 12,000) through the Alabama

Communities of Excellence program. ACE communities are guided through three stages of assistance, which include (1) an inventory of community assets, (2) the creation of a leadership program and strategic plan and (3) help with comprehensive planning and implementation of key elements of the strategic plan.

- Seven communities from the initial 2003 class have been designated Alabama Communities of Excellence: Brewton, Demopolis, Guin, Guntersville, Haleyville, Monroeville and Valley. ECDI and its ACE partners are currently working with nine other communities selected to participate in the program: Atmore, Gulf Shores, Fayette, Headland, Heflin, Jackson, Jacksonville, Millbrook and Thomasville.

- For more information, visit www.alabamacommunitiesofexcellence.org.

Tourism and retiree attraction.

ECDI provides assistance in tourism and retiree attraction to communities and tourism organizations throughout Alabama. Tom Chesnutt is one of Alabama's foremost tourism experts, specializing in agritourism program development. Dr. Chesnutt is the author of several publications available through ECDI, including:

- "Tourism: An Effective Tool for Economic Development" (2007)
- "Developing Agri-Tourism Attractions in Alabama" (2007)
- "Why Attract Retirees to Your Community?" (2002)
- "Establishing a Retiree Attraction Program in Your Community" (2002)
- "Marketing Your Community to Attract Retirees" (2002)

2. Education.

Auburn University Intensive Economic Development Training Course. ECDI's annual two-week Auburn University Intensive Economic Development Training Course has played a central role in economic and community development education in Alabama for over 20 years. The Course's 700 alumni include most of Alabama's top economic and community development professionals.

- The 2006 class was the largest class in the history of the course. Participants included elected officials, representatives from utility companies, chambers of commerce, industrial development boards, state agencies, regional planning commissions and private industries.
- For more information, visit www.auburn.edu/edi/intensivecourse.html.

Impact Alabama Roundtable.

ECDI, in partnership with the Auburn University President's Office, has initiated a new executive economic development education program for Alabama's top economic developers. The Impact Alabama Roundtable brings together a select group of economic development executives for roundtable discussions on Alabama's most important economic development challenges.

Auburn University Graduate Minor in Economic Development.

ECDI administers the interdisciplinary AU Graduate Minor in Economic Development. The graduate minor in economic development is available to graduate students pursuing degrees in business, public administration, community planning and rural sociology.

3. Research.

Publications about rural Alabama.

ECDI provides strong leadership for the economic development of Alabama's rural communities. The following EDI publications brought overdue attention to rural problems and strategies for addressing them:

- "Listening to Rural Alabama: A Report on Alabama Rural Prosperity Forums" (2005) www.auburn.edu/edi/listeningruralal.pdf
- "Crossroads and Connections: Strategies for Rural Alabama" (2004) www.auburn.edu/edi/candcsm.pdf
- "Beyond the Interstate: The Crisis in Rural Alabama" (2003) www.auburn.edu/edi/beyondtheinterstate.pdf

2006 Alabama Local Economic Development Survey. ECDI published the results of its most recent Alabama Local Economic Development Survey in August 2006. The survey provides information

about economic development planning, organization, practices, and needs that exist in Alabama's cities and counties.

- To view the survey results, visit www.auburn.edu/edi/survey06.pdf.

Kettering Foundation research in civil economics ECDI's research for the Kettering Foundation about the influence of civic engagement on community economic development has received international acclaim. The project report has been translated into Spanish and is used throughout Latin America as a model for engaging citizens in distressed communities.

I-85 Asset Inventory. ECDI maintains an inventory of economic and community development assets located in an eight-county region from the Georgia state line to Montgomery along Interstate 85.

- To view the inventory, visit www.auburn.edu/edi/i85assetinventory.pdf.

4. Communication, connections and partnerships.

ECDI Web site and resource directory. ECDI maintains the state's most comprehensive Web site for information about community and economic development.

Action

Alabama
Communities
in Transition

Editor

J. Thomas Chesnutt

Extension Tourism Specialist



Your Experts for Life

"Action" is published once each quarter by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

We would like you to share success stories in your community for inclusion in future issues of "Action." Send to: J. Thomas Chesnutt, 218 Extension Hall, Auburn University, Alabama 36849.

ECDI also is developing a comprehensive directory of Alabama's resources for community and economic development.

- For more information, visit www.auburn.edu/edi.

I-85 Corridor Alliance. ECDI is the home for the I-85 Corridor Alliance, and Joe Sumners serves as its executive director. The I-85 Corridor Alliance is a regional partnership of government, civic, business and educational stakeholders dedicated to promoting innovation, prosperity, collaboration and competitiveness along Interstate 85 in Alabama.

- For more information, visit www.auburn.edu/i85corr.

Supporting Alabama's economy.

ECDI maintains a directory of Auburn University resources for business and economic and community development. It identifies and describes Auburn University outreach and research units and programs from a wide range of disciplines that are positively impacting the state's economy and quality of life.

- To view the directory, visit www.auburn.edu/edi/supportingal.pdf.

ECDI Plans for 2007

Grant program. ECDI will approve proposals and allocate approximately \$300,000 of annual Extension state-appropriated funding for local economic and community development mini-grants. ECDI will give priority to projects related to asset mapping, leadership development, civic engagement and strategic planning. ECDI also will administer a grant program of approximately \$1 million dollars for Extension and the Rural Conservation & Development Council. These grants also may be used for community and economic development projects.

Rural development. We believe that prosperous rural economies are built upon strong communities. We also believe that healthy communities require engaged citizens and leadership that is inclusive, collaborative and connected. So, if ECDI is to help revitalize rural communities, there is no better place to start than to focus on leadership development and civic engagement.

• **Leadership.** A new, more dynamic model of the community leader as a catalyst, connector and consensus-builder has replaced the traditional notion of the community leader (often a mayor) as the chief community problem-solver. Of course, leadership is not confined to elected officials, business leaders and those with specific titles or wealth. Successful communities recognize that they must mobilize the talents and energy of every segment of the community. Thus, communities that grow and prosper tend to be full of leaders.

© **2007 Plans.** An ECDI leadership development specialist will work with communities to create new leadership programs and make improvements in existing programs. ECDI also will inventory all current leadership development programs in Alabama and develop methods for providing information and sharing best practices with and among these programs. The ECDI grant program will support innovative local leadership development initiatives.

• **Civic engagement and connections.** One of the best hopes for economic progress lies in taking steps to engage citizens and to build connections among a community's stakeholders. To prosper, rural communities must identify all available assets and begin to connect these assets in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness.

© **2007 Plans.** ECDI will provide assistance to communities for asset mapping, strategic planning, citizen engagement, issue roundtables, deliberative forums and stakeholder collaboration. The ECDI grant program will support innovative local projects in these areas. ECDI also will serve as a clearinghouse for information about rural Alabama by creating and maintaining a new rural Alabama Web site. ECDI also will convene with rural stakeholders to discuss issues and strategies.

Education. Building on the success of the Intensive Economic Development Training Course, ECDI will offer additional

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training opportunities for Intensive Course alumni, as well as other Alabama economic developers, community leaders and Extension staff. ECDI will offer workshops and short courses on topics relevant to economic and community development in Alabama.

Final Word.

I am very excited about the opportunities for this partnership. There is much that needs to be done to improve economic conditions throughout Alabama, especially in our rural areas. Combining the resources of Auburn University and Extension in a common effort puts us in a great position to make a positive difference for our state.

The urban component of Extension's Community and Economic Development program area will remain under the direction of the Extension staff at Alabama A&M University.

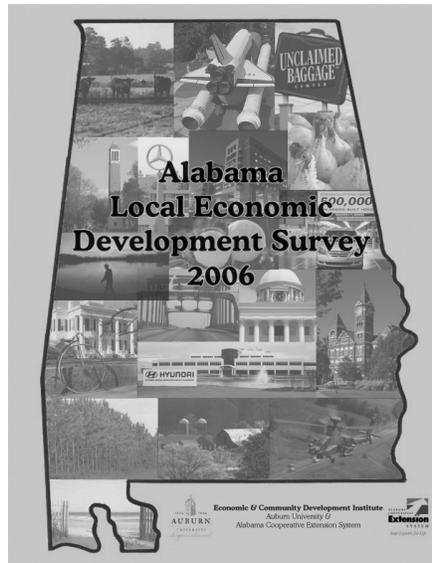
Joe A. Sumners
Director
Economic and Community
Development Institute

"The long-term strategic goal of the ECDI is to bring rural economic and community development programming and community service to a much higher level of visibility than it has ever had in the past in our state."

Gaines Smith, Interim Director
Alabama Cooperative Extension System

"Auburn University's ability to positively impact economic and community development throughout the state of Alabama will be strengthened by this partnership. Dr. Sumners has provided great leadership to the Economic Development Institute and will provide even greater leadership to ECDI."

Royrickers Cook,
Assistant Vice President for Outreach
Auburn University



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