

ACTION

From the Editor

Local Extension Community Development Programs

The Community Development Society views community development as the integration of knowledge from many areas with theory, research, teaching and practice. That is one of the primary roles of the Economic and Community Development Institute. A vital key to our success in this effort are the individual county Extension coordinators located in each of Alabama's 67 counties. All are active in developing many types of community development programs, such as leadership training, strategic planning, workforce education, asset mapping, and economic development, among others.

ECDI, a partnership of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and Auburn University, publishes "Action" once each quarter. ECDI's vision is to become the state's preeminent change agent for positive economic and community development policy and practice. ECDI attempts to serve Alabama communities, especially small and medium-sized rural and economically distressed areas, and to maintain effective connections and communication among the many diverse economic development actors in Alabama. "Action" is one of the methods we use to accomplish these goals.

Local Extension community development programs are the focus of this winter 2008 issue of "Action." J. Thomas Chesnutt, Extension tourism specialist with ECDI, is the coordinator for this segment of the newsletter, and two county Extension coordinators, Danny L. Cain and Yvonne D. Thomas, and County Extension Agent Katrina Mitchell have contributed articles. Authors for the other segments of this newsletter include Arturo Menefee, leadership development specialist with ECDI, Edith J. Williams with Write the Vision, and Jimmy Jones, Henry County Extension coordinator.

The next issue of "Action," spring 2008, will highlight Rural Alabama Initiative grant success stories. For more information on these topics or suggestions for additional topics, contact the editor at (334) 844-3517, fax (334) 844-4709, or e-mail chesnjt@auburn.edu.

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Local Extension Community Development Programs

Youth Leadership Elmore County

The 4-H program, Youth Leadership Elmore County, is now accepting applications for the 2007-2008 year. This program is about to begin its sixth year. Each year, this program allows approximately 20 high school students in Elmore County to enhance their leadership, communication, personal and group skills. Students also experience leadership opportunities at the city, county and state government levels.

Youth Leadership Elmore County is held each month from October through April with a graduation celebration held in May. Curriculum lessons along with field trips to various government entities, including city, county and state government, enable students to experience and develop leadership life skills. The students are also required to design and implement a community service project.

Students are selected through a process of referral, interviews and a minimum grade standard. Students are also required to maintain a 3.0 grade point average throughout the program.

To date, students have given back more than 600 hours in community service. Students have also been proactive in getting involved with the State Legislature through the page program

and have addressed city councils with youth concerns.

These students have had been exposed to various aspects of government that many adults have not seen. As a result, the youth are often better educated and more aware of community development concerns. As these youth graduate from high school and postsecondary education programs, they will be equipped to participate in government and community development.

Funding for Youth Leadership Elmore County for the past five years has been provided by the Alabama Electric Cooperative, local funding through the Elmore County Extension office, limited funding from Wal-Mart in Wetumpka, Alabama Gas Corporation, the Elmore County Community Foundation, and the Alabama Civil Justice Foundation.

New developments in this program include funding through the Rural Alabama Initiative grant. This funding allowed expansion of Youth Leadership Elmore County to the Tallassee area. Although Tallassee youth have been invited and included in the Youth Leadership Elmore County program, distance and the high level of involvement of Tallassee City students in local extracurricular activities has prevented most of the interested students from participating. The Rural Alabama Initiative grant allowed a Youth Leadership Elmore County program to be held in Tallassee for those students. These students will join the Youth Leadership Elmore County students in team building activities and in the year-end graduation celebration.

Katrina Mitchell
Elmore County Extension Agent
Alabama Cooperative Extension System



Conservation on the Ground – Cawaco Helps Sponsor a Stream Restoration Workshop

Jasper was selected to be a pilot town to study stream restoration with the Cawaco Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) as one of the sponsors of the activity. Representatives from North Carolina State University (NCSU), and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System collaborated to coordinate the project. The purpose of the collaboration was to put more eyes on the waterways of Alabama. Jasper was selected because of the immense interest exhibited by city officials and local organizations in stream restoration.

The first step in the process was a two-day workshop to both educate those interested in studying the ecological factors of waterways as well as to identify areas for improvement in Jasper's streams. Three Jasper streams were studied during the workshop: Doctor's Branch, Tanyard Creek and Town Creek. Representatives from Auburn University and NCSU led discussions on the factors that contribute to the stream's quality. Rather than studying the chemical makeup or quality of the water, the workshop addressed how well the streams perform as ecosystems. The topics included such aspects as the number of insects as well as native and nonnative vegetation.

"We wanted to come to a down-and-dirty estimate of what Jasper streams needed," said one participant.

An assessment of the streams by Dr. Greg Jennings, professor at NCSU, indicated that the streams in Jasper are doing well for being in such an urban area. He was pleased with the number of insects in the streams. However, there are opportunities for improvement, particularly regarding nonnative vegetation.

Workshop participants said they learned a great deal through the hands-on activities. Project coordinators were pleased by the support of people from the community, particularly the Walker County Commission, the Black Warrior Clean Water Partnership and the Jasper City Planners.

Danny L. Cain

Walker County Extension Coordinator
Alabama Cooperative Extension System

Youth Leadership Autauga County Teaches the Importance of Community Service and Civic Engagement

In the past decade, the idea that young people can and should work in partnership with adults to improve conditions in their communities has gained tremendous attention. If youth are to learn to function as effective members of society, they must be fully engaged and involved in change efforts at the community level. Youth leadership is recognized as a positive, desired youth development outcome.

Communication, analytical thinking, community involvement and efficacy are key components that have made the Autauga County Youth Leadership Program successful. Youth Leadership Autauga County (YLAC) was launched as a project of Leadership Autauga County Class of 2002. The program was established to bring together high school juniors who represent the diversity of the

Autauga County population, and who share concerns for improving the quality of life in Autauga County. Participants are chosen based on a willingness and ability to assume leadership responsibilities in Autauga County. Through the years, YLAC has evolved into a competitive, highly visible community resource development project providing young people with training and experiences in leadership and civic action.

For the past six years, members of the YLAC board of directors (youth and adults) have collaborated with businesses and industry, municipal, county and state governments to develop a nine-month youth leadership program. Youth Leadership participants attend monthly enrichment seminars designed to explore and build leadership skills; grapple with real-life social issues; plunge their hands, minds and hearts in community service; and enhance participants' understanding of local and state government.

During these sessions, students interact with community leaders and experience what has been referred to as "life events" – influential experiences that shape their interest and life choices over the long term. Moreover, youth engage in hands-on, minds-on activities designed to teach them the importance of protecting and developing their economic, natural and social resources in ways that improve the economy, environment and quality of life for the citizens of Autauga County. The program is designed to promote four components: communication skills by valuing young people's thoughts and ideas; analytical thinking through community asset mapping; opportunities for positive community involvement; and atmosphere of youth efficacy.

Yvonne D. Thomas

Autauga County Extension Coordinator
Alabama Cooperative Extension System

Resource Tools Communicating Effectively

One of the major barriers to community development is the lack of effective communication among leaders, residents and various groups throughout the community. Therefore, good communication skills are essential. Verbal and nonverbal language is an art of communicating exactly what one wants to convey to others. Effective communication determines how well individuals are understood and how well we understand others. The basic elements of the communication process include the following:

- **Sender** (encode) – The sender begins with an idea or image of the thing that he or she wants to communicate.
- **Message** (verbal and nonverbal) – Words and actions are constructed together to create a message.
- **Receiver** (decode) – The message is sent to a receiver who decodes it, using his or her selection and sorting process.
- **Feedback** (receiver's understanding) – The receiver provides feedback to the sender, indicating how he or she interpreted the message.

Oral Presentations. To combat stage fright, take deep slow breaths and relax. Speak loudly and clearly, keep

eye contact and communicate one's personality and friendliness. Generally, presenters should focus on three to five main points, so that one does not lose the attention of the audience. **Keep it SIMPLE!**

- **Senses & Imagery.** Appeal to the audience on more than one level: intellectually (facts and figures), visually (Power Point, handouts or giveaways), audibly (sound), and emotionally (music, pictures or stories).
- **Minimum Points.** Decide on three to five major points that relate to each other.
- **Laughter & Exercises.** Make it funny; laughter is good for the soul. Include the audience with a song, game or discussion.

Keep in mind that nonverbal communication methods are extremely important because they are cues that convey a message to the audience during an oral presentation. Nonverbal communication includes facial expression, posture (standing and sitting), gestures, voice and visual aids.

Listening. Listening is used more than any other communication skill, but most have never had training in developing listening techniques. While most people talk around 150 words a minute, listeners hear in the thousands of words per minute. Listeners tend to evaluate and judge the speaker and his/her ideas instead of what the speaker actually said. The basic listening skills are the following:

- Listen actively (attentive).
- Remain objective (open-minded).
- Avoid evaluating.
- Listen for what is not said.
- Listen for consensus.
- Be a complete listener.

Written Communication. Effective written communication takes time and skill because such a small portion of our communication is contained in the words themselves. Leaders and managers must deliver their messages clearly, succinctly and effectively to be successful. Remember that once something is in written form, it cannot be taken back. Poorly written messages create confusion

or fail to achieve their intended purpose. The following are effective written communication tips:

- State goals clearly.
- Explain what the person receiving the messages needs to do.
- Explain the benefits for responding as requested.
- Establish credibility and show respect for the reader.
- Choose an appropriate communication method.

E-mail Communication. E-mail is becoming the predominant form of business communication. It is unprofessional to send out an e-mail with spelling errors. Therefore, if an e-mail appears to be sloppy and unprofessional, then the individual sending the message will be perceived as unprofessional. Consider drafting a correspondence in a word processing file first and copy or attach it to the e-mail. Understanding e-mail messages are certainly essential for communication purposes. For instance, using all lower case letters can be interpreted as laziness, and all upper case letters can be interpreted as shouting. Before sending an e-mail message, write it, read it and make certain that spell check and grammar features are on.

References

- Community Leadership Program (Fanning Leadership Center)
- Effective Writing Tips (Itstime.com)
- How to Conduct Productive Meetings (Toastmasters)
- Simple and Effective Presentations (DML Training & Consulting)
- Spelling It Out: Treat E-mails as Serious Business (National Notary Association)
- Spotlight on Effective Communication (National Association of Parliamentarians)
- Writing Skills (Mindtools.com)

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Alabama
Communities
in Transition

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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.



What's Happening in Alabama

AU President Visits Extension Office

Dr. Jay Gogue, Auburn University's 18th president, visited the Alabama Cooperative Extension System's Henry County office in Abbeville recently. The visit was part of a series of the new president's visits to Extension offices and university research facilities across Alabama.

While in Henry County, Gogue gave a brief history of land-grant universities. He stated that the goals of land-grant universities were to make agriculture more efficient, create engineering or mechanical arts programs and to provide a place for the children of the working class to attend college. He reminded those present that agriculture still provides 17 percent of the gross national product. Gogue also had the opportunity to meet with Jimmy Jones, Henry County Extension coordinator. Jones informed the president of Auburn University of the recent situation involving the West Point Pepperell Mill closing. Jones stated that in response to one of the county's major employers (West Point Pepperell) announcing plans to close its facilities this past summer, the Henry County Extension and community leaders in Henry County organized a job fair. More than 700 participants from the closing plant and 45 businesses participated. More than 300 job applications were distributed and approximately 200 job applications were completed at the fair. People were hired as a direct result of the fair. Some 36 participants attended workshops after the job fair and 45 others

signed up for GED classes. Volunteers contributed 825 hours to the job fair, which is an estimated value of \$14,182.

After his visit to the county Extension office, Gogue traveled to nearby Headland to meet with the faculty and staff at the Wiregrass Research and Extension Center. Gogue plans to visit the Extension office in each of the state's 67 counties in the coming months.

References

- o Auburn University (<http://www.auburn.edu/administration/president/bio.html>)
- o Extension Daily, Margaret Lawrence, Communications Specialist, Alabama Cooperative Extension System (www.aces.edu)
- o The Headland Observer (Oct. 4, 2007)

Jimmy Jones
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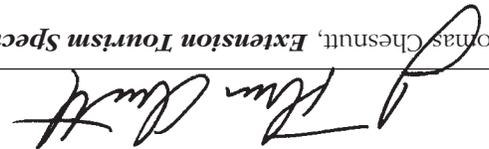
Visit the Community Resource Development home page at www.aces.edu/departments/crd/

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