

# ACTION

## From the Editor

Seeking grant money can be time-consuming and often frustrating. The Rural Alabama Initiative (RAI) grant program was created by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and is administered by the Economic and Community Development Institute. The RAI grant program provides seed money for worthwhile educational initiatives related to community and economic development. RAI grants range between \$1,000 and \$25,000 and are awarded to fund worthy local projects in communities throughout Alabama.

"Action" is a quarterly publication of ECDI, a partnership of ACES and Auburn University. The mission of ECDI is to improve the quality of life of all Alabama citizens by promoting continuous improvement of economic and community development policy and practice through communication, education, research and community assistance. ECDI seeks to play a leading role in revitalizing Alabama communities, especially in the state's rural areas. ECDI intends to strengthen community capacity to engage local challenges, take advantage of opportunities and build on available assets. "Action" is one tool we use to link AU and ACES resources to community groups.

**Rural Alabama Initiative Success Stories** is the focus of this Spring 2009 issue of "Action". Mike Easterwood, Project Management Specialist with ECDI, is the coordinator for newsletter.

The next issue of "Action", Summer 2009, will highlight the I-85 Corridor Project. For more information on these topics or suggestions for additional topics, contact the editor by phone (334) 844-3517, fax (334) 844-4709 or email chesnjt@auburn.edu.

**J. Thomas Chesnutt, Editor**  
Extension Tourism Specialist, ECDI

## Rural Alabama Initiative Success Stories

The Rural Alabama Initiative (RAI) grant program was initiated by ACES in 2007 to provide financial assistance to worthy educational economic and community development projects throughout Alabama. In 2007, RAI funded 48 grants. Thirty-six projects were selected for RAI funding in 2008, and fiscal year 2009 featured 13 RAI projects. Over \$1.1 million in RAI grant support has been provided for the three project years. RAI grants can range from \$1,000 to \$25,000 and must involve the participation of local county Extension coordinators. The primary focus of RAI projects is on rural communities, although some urban projects have been supported as well. The RAI program also emphasizes projects that feature partnerships and collaborations.

ACES initiated RAI to help Alabama's small communities bring to fruition their ideas about improving their economies through educational projects. Since the start of the program in 2007, RAI grant support has helped nearly 100 organizations realize their economic and community development goals. Many of these projects have been particularly successful in producing significant improvements in local economies and the quality of community life. For 2008, the following RAI projects are among the most successful.

## Leadership and Vocational Career Development for Limestone County Youth

(Limestone County Extension office)

This project provided Limestone County youth opportunities to explore career opportunities in agricultural science and family and consumer science. A three-phase approach was utilized: 1) leadership skill training; 2) focused tours that provided youth firsthand information on agricultural science and family/consumer science career opportunities; and 3) educational forums on agricultural science and family/consumer science careers. The targeted tour phase included a five-day itinerary with stops at the University of Alabama, Auburn University and state agencies in Montgomery that are involved in agriculture and consumer and family issues. The leadership skill development phase featured presentations on the basics of leadership as well as presentations by participating youth on leadership topics.

## Teen Arts Collaborative Drug Awareness

(Cleburne County Extension office)

This innovative project used a play ("Juvie") as a vehicle to educate youth that poor choices can lead to bad consequences that linger. The play featured students from county schools and was presented six times at three venues: Ranburne High School, Cleburne County High School and the Casey Auditorium. Characters in the play were involved in theft, destruction of property, arson and drug possession and trafficking. The negative consequences of these activities were presented as the play unfolded. The project staff documented the play's impact on cast and audience members in the form of written comments. Based on both written and

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oral comments received, the project was very successful in highlighting the disastrous consequences of certain behavior.

## Work Experience for Deaf Teens

(Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind, Tuscaloosa Regional Center)

This project placed teens with hearing impairments from the Tuscaloosa AIDB service area with local employers as temporary workers. Nine students were involved in the project; each student was placed at an employment location that matched his or her career interests. Work areas included nursing, cosmetology, veterinary medicine, computer aided design, automobile sales, law, medical records and automobile repair/maintenance. Feedback from participating students was positive, with several indicating that they gained a deeper understanding of their potential career fields. Employers noted that they benefited as well, gaining a new appreciation for the challenges faced by workers with hearing impairments.

## Leadership Selma-Dallas County

(Dallas County Extension office)

The Leadership Selma-Dallas County RAI project involved a year-long leadership development activity for youth (high school juniors) and adults in a five-county area. The project featured topics on leadership skills, team building, cultural diversity, money management, career development, economic development and healthy living. The youth and adult programs began with a retreat at the state 4-H Center. The youth leadership program featured a youth forum that attracted over 300 senior high school students. Youth and adult participants were involved in "State Government Day," which focused on becoming more familiar with Alabama's elected leaders and state political issues. Both youth and adult program participants carried out community service projects: Youth participants promoted the Youth Red Cross Blood Drive, the Blanket Drive and the Canned Food Project; adult participants assisted in voter registration activities, judging for 4-H projects and Camp Grist (Selma) improvements.

## Shoals Summer Technology Institute for Educators

(Shoals Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation)

This project provided Shoals area educators the opportunity to improve their understanding of current technical education trends and the career options available to students with a technical education background. The basic premise of the project is that many educators, including teachers, principals and school board members, do not fully understand the nature of technical education and the employment opportunities associated with technical education programs. The project focused on middle and high school math and science teachers and counselors, but other educators were also invited to participate. A two-week summer workshop highlighted the project. This session allowed participating educators to spend time at 11 different technical programs offered at Northwest-Shoals Community College. Participants also toured area technology-based industries to learn more about how the needs of industry can be addressed through technical education.

## Your Town Alabama

(Your Town Alabama, Inc.)

Your Town Alabama is one of the most successful small-town planning and design programs in the nation. The program brings small-town leaders together at Camp McDowell in Winston County for a three-day workshop that features small-group

work sessions devoted to examining the best ways to handle new developments in rural communities. Each work group develops its own recommendations for dealing with new development challenges in an imaginary small town. After working out possible solutions, each work group presents its recommended design and planning solutions to the project staff and program participants. The emphasis of the Your Town program is not on developing specific answers to particular questions but on providing participants with a framework for problem solving that could be utilized in their own communities.

## Escambia County Computer Literacy Initiative

(Escambia County Extension office)

The Computer Literacy Initiative was designed to help a variety of Escambia County residents improve their computer skills through targeted workshops conducted at Jeff Davis Community College in Brewton. County leaders realized that many local residents lacked the basic skills needed to operate a modern computer system and to utilize the Internet to improve their business opportunities. Specific sessions were devoted to training for farmers, displaced workers and small business owners. In addition, sessions were offered to ordinary citizens who needed help in joining the digital age. Sessions included topics such as computer business skills, electronic communications and web design.



Participants in the RAI-funded Escambia County Computer Literacy Initiative

## Junior Leadership Lake Martin

(Tallapoosa County Extension office)

The Junior Leadership Lake Martin RAI project brought together high school students from throughout Tallapoosa County to learn new leadership skills and, after mastering these new skills, apply them in their own communities. Twenty-five high school students participated in the program. The students took part in sessions devoted to community leadership, municipal services and programs, state government, community health services, criminal justice, education and economic development.

## Youth Leadership Bullock County

(Bullock County Extension office)

Bullock County officials recognize that the future of their county will depend on today's youth. They recognize the need to produce a group of young leaders capable of assuming leadership positions in local business and government organizations. To that end, the Bullock County Extension office secured a 2008 RAI grant to train county high school students in basic leadership skills, citizenship, local government and personal conduct and appearance. The Bullock County program also offered students opportunities to participate in sessions devoted to Bullock County history and economy.

## Town of Emelle Learning Center

(Town of Emelle, Ala.)

This small, west Alabama community's RAI project provided specialized training for about fifty high school students from Emelle and the surrounding area. The community learning center features new computer systems and software designed to help students who need remedial assistance in school or who wish to complete their GED. Additional learning center services include computer-based assistance for job seekers and access to computer-enhanced materials for the state high school graduation exam and college entrance exams. The project also featured a community job and health fair and a scholarship/parenting event.

## Monroe County Youth Leadership Program

(Monroe County Extension office)

Interviews with Monroe County schools, businesses and local government leaders revealed the need to establish a strong youth leadership development program that could supply a trained group of leaders for the county. With financial assistance from RAI, the county Extension office created the Monroe Youth Leadership Program. The program consisted of two parts: Part I was a series of field trips and workshops devoted to conflict management, personal improvement (appearance, manners, etc.), financial literacy, interviewing skills and character education; part II consisted of training by a certified Dale Carnegie instructor to build life skills (personal confidence, etc.) and enhance communication, teamwork and leadership skills.

## Winston County Schools Career Quest

(Winston County Board of Education)

The purpose of this project was to provide county high school students a promising career path through the use of computer technology. Project funds were used to purchase a software program (Odysseyware) to help student fill in learning gaps that could prevent them from securing a good job after graduation. Through the use of computer technology at the Winston County Technical Center, students explored a wide range of possible career paths and identified gaps or weaknesses in their educational background. Teachers used the data collected from the RAI project to design remediation programs and to suggest classes that could address identified gaps.

## Leadership Barbour

(Leadership Barbour, Inc.)

After an extensive study of community assets and needs, county officials identified leadership development as the most important need for the county. RAI grant funds were utilized to improve the existing Leadership Barbour program. Special instructors (such as the mayor of Tupelo, Miss.) were brought in through RAI support to discuss topics of particular interest to leadership trainees. Grant funds also supported a class trip to Montgomery to visit with state political and administrative agency officials. Other program topics included local

government operations, team-building and problem-solving skills, education, health, diversity, communication skills and networking.

## Leadership Greene

(Leadership Greene, Inc.)

The Leadership Greene project focused on developing skilled new leaders for Greene County. Through a carefully designed curriculum, adult trainees participated in a seven-month process that allowed them not only to learn useful leadership skills but also to apply those skills in community settings throughout the county. The training sessions focused on expanding the awareness of community issues and problems, learning about how public policy decisions are made, developing useful leadership skills and creating a network of local leaders who are willing to participate in efforts to improve the county. In addition to the local training sessions, all trainees attended the Alabama Prosperity Forum and the two-week Intensive Economic Development Training course offered by the ECDI at Auburn University.

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### ACTION

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.

Visit the ECDI home page at  
<http://www.auburn.edu/outreach/ecdi/>.

## Art Camp 2008

(Clay County Arts League)

The Art Camp 2008 RAI project was a week-long interactive learning session for Clay County youth. It provided participants an opportunity to explore the visual and performing arts. Over 200 children participated in the 2008 session, which included presentations dealing with drama, music, dance and the visual arts. All camp attendees had the opportunity not only to learn more about various art forms through lectures but also to actively participate in performance opportunities. Campers rotated through six sessions each day of Art Camp, thereby maximizing their exposure to all artistic fields.

## Enhancement of Henry County Workforce Development and Leadership Development

(Headland Industrial Development Board)

This project had three primary objectives: 1) to educate parents and children about the importance of obtaining a high school diploma; 2) to provide skill development

educational programs for West Point Stevens (Abbeville) employees who were terminated due to the mill closing; and 3) to develop job readiness programs through local high schools and the region's community colleges.

## Leadership Wilcox

(Wilcox County Extension office)

Leadership Wilcox focused on preparing a cadre of new adult leaders for the county. Participants in the Leadership Wilcox program attended an overnight retreat at the 4-H Center and six leadership training sessions. Topics included county and state government, economic development, education, agriculture and human services.

Mike Easterwood

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### Important Upcoming Events

Alabama Prosperity Forum courses:

- **Strategies for Building Communities—AU, April 16-17**
- **“Going Green” Sustainable Economic Development—AU, June 18-19**

**Intensive Economic Development Training course—AU, July 13-17 & Sept 14-18**

Visit the ECDI home page at [www.auburn.edu/outreach/ecdi/](http://www.auburn.edu/outreach/ecdi/)

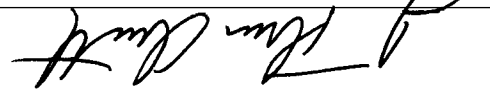
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