About Urban Affairs & New Nontraditional Programs
Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs, located on the campus of Alabama A&M University, was established in 1995 as a unit and base program area of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. Today, it stands as a national leader in delivering urban Extension programs and services that help to sustain businesses and the environment, and impact the lives of Alabama’s growing and diverse populations.

Mission
The mission of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System's Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs Unit is to provide learning opportunities to meet the needs of all urban and nontraditional audiences with a specific focus on limited-resource families, underserved audiences, individuals, and small enterprises.

Vision
The Alabama Cooperative Extension System envisions a comprehensive statewide Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs Unit encompassing traditional, nontraditional, new and emerging programs, and delivery approaches in order to meet the needs of Alabama citizens wherever they live and work. The focus however, is to meet the needs of urban, ex-urban and suburban communities to improve their quality of life.

A special thanks to everyone who helped to make this publication possible, including the program participants who shared their enriching and life-changing stories.
# Table of Contents

From the Administrators.........................................................................................................................4

Animal Sciences and Forages....................................................................................................................5-6

Consumer Sciences & Personal Financial Management.................................................................7

Economic & Community Development..................................................................................................8

Family and Child Development..............................................................................................................9-10

Forestry, Wildlife, & Natural Resource Management.................................................................11

Home Grounds, Gardens & Home Pests...............................................................................................12

Human Nutrition, Diet & Health...........................................................................................................13-14

4-H and Youth Development & Volunteerism..................................................................................15-16

2010-2011 Urban Extension Programs..............................................................................................17

The Urban Difference in Numbers.....................................................................................................18

2011-2012 Urban Affairs Staff............................................................................................................19
From the Administrators

The Difference We Make is a system-wide marketing initiative of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System that captures the impacts Extension makes across the state of Alabama. Extension’s Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs Unit at Alabama A&M University, takes these words very seriously. We don’t execute a program, plan an activity, or move forward with any work without asking, “What difference will this make for the people in our target audiences?” Our job is to make sure that we listen to the people first, analyze what they are saying, and then develop programs and activities that will bring about positive change. And not just change for our clients, but change with lasting impacts.

So, when we help aging grandparents to develop new parenting skills so they can become primary caregivers for grand and great grandchildren, we do so knowing that keeping the family together and the child out of publically-supported facilities and/or part of the swelling foster care rolls is a direct benefit to all of us.

When those burdened with debt find ways out of that quagmire or are able to hold onto or to buy a new home, we all benefit. Why? Homeowners are more vested in their neighborhoods and research shows that children of homeowners do better in school and are more likely to become successful adults. That’s a benefit to us all.

And offering opportunities for small animal or plant producers so there is access to fresh supplies of healthy, affordable foods is a benefit to us all. Health statistics, particularly those in the Southern states, show an aging population that indulges in unhealthy, greasy, and sugar-laden foods. Obesity reports from Trust for America’s Health further noted that the South’s weight problem remains acute, and that 67% of adults and 36% of children age 10-17 in Alabama are considered obese. So, our programs to help neighborhoods develop community gardens, to assist residents with weight loss, and how to eat and enjoy nutritious foods, benefits us all.

In essence, the work we do through Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs has tremendous public value. We don’t want to just do the work. We want to do the work that makes a difference in the lives of the people we serve daily.

This is why we’re excited to share the first edition of The Urban Difference. This document clearly demonstrates examples of work we do to make a difference for Alabama. These aren’t just stories about Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs. These are stories about what we do to move people in a positive direction. It’s their story. It’s their change. It’s their difference. It’s our difference. It’s The Urban Difference. Enjoy!
The North Carolina Farms Tour was funded by a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) outreach grant to assist socially disadvantaged producers. Funds were awarded to both Alabama A&M and Tennessee State universities in a multi-state training effort. Dr. Browning, also a member of the Alabama Ethnic Food Security Network (AEFSN) established by Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs, led the producer group on tour with other professionals from the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Tennessee State University, and the USDA.

Global meat goat production has increased the last 20 years, but the US has not been able to keep up with market demands, particularly in those areas with growing ethnic communities. While the tours were designed to help producers learn more about cost-effective meat goat production, participants also learned about dairy goat marketing, and milk and cheese, sheep, beef, swine, and poultry and egg production systems.

AEFSN follows the Extension model and uses a variety of methods to support and encourage producers, including meetings, demonstrations, tours, workshops and publications. Newton said she’s taken advantage of all that Extension has to offer.

“Every time I go to a meeting, I find out something I’ve done wrong,” Newton said. “Last time I found out I wasn’t adding enough salt to the sheep’s diet and that’s why they were puny. I’ve changed that mixture, and I’m expecting change in the animals. Right there, they made a difference for me.”

Newton has been farming for most of her life. She previously owned a larger farm in St. Clair County, but after the death of her husband, she lost that farm. She’s now working on a smaller farm and looking for information that can help her so her enterprise is profitable and sustainable.
**When it comes to offering assistance to small farmers to make their farming operations profitable and sustainable, Urban Regional Extension Specialist Robert Spencer doesn’t let something like an ocean hinder his efforts.**

Spencer, who has been traveling to Haiti and volunteering his services since 2006, is part of the Partners of Americas’ Farmer-to-Farmer Program sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Through this program, US agricultural volunteers share their knowledge on an individual basis to help increase farm productivity and farmer incomes, while assisting in the preservation of the natural resource base in global communities.

All agriculture is global according to the United States Department of Agriculture, so the success of the US agricultural industry depends on America’s ability to trade and compete with other nations. As well, agricultural science depends on international research partnerships to address issues like food safety, sustainability, resource management, biotechnology, and crop and livestock disease prevention.

During his time in Haiti, Spencer has worked with Makouti Agro Enterprises, a farmer’s cooperative whose members offer a variety of products, including rabbit meat, honey, jelly, coffee, and cocoa. One of his latest projects was to help support opportunities for women in agriculture, particularly women raising chickens for meat production.

Every six weeks, Makouti provides the female members with 20 baby birds, a portable poultry housing unit, feed, and equipment. In turn, the women raise the birds to maturity and once they are sold at market, pay Makouti a small percentage based on sales, and begin the process again.

Women participating in this program can make about $64 every six weeks. In a country where the average wage is $20-$30 a week, $64 can help supplement the family’s income and provide food.

“Basically, it provides economic opportunities for women in a country where unemployment levels exceed 40 percent,” Spencer said. “Given chicken is one of the most trusted and consumed forms of meat in Haiti, you begin to realize there is a significant need and opportunity.”

During his most recent visit, Spencer attempted to assemble the parts for an electric chicken plucker. Finding all the items turned out to be a lot more complicated than expected, but he got the project started and left them with the instructions needed to complete the project. A plucker, Spencer said, will speed up the processing time and help with the development of food cooperatives.

“Assuming enough female farmers in a rural community form a working cooperative, and on a regular schedule gather 100 birds for processing and retail, this would reduce processing times and generate about $800 to be divided among the group every six weeks,” Spencer said.

“And for a nominal fee they can offer their services to process other people’s birds. This model is expected to be implemented throughout various communities in Haiti, and to promote retail sales to nearby larger cities.”

— Robert Spencer

*Chickens being raised as a result of animal and equipment donations from Makouti Agro Enterprises in Haiti*

*“Time and initiative spent in developing countries ensures food security for families and makes an improvement in the quality of their lives.”* - Robert Spencer
In addition, participants received money management calendars, savings tips, and piggy banks, all designed to help participants to develop a spending plan and to implement a saving plan. Other activities like check writing, reviewing bank statements, and filling out deposit and withdrawal slips, prepared participants for what to expect after opening a checking account.

The program’s overall objectives are to help families improve their financial health and to avoid indebtedness and bankruptcy. Families with strong financial health also avoid using public programs for food, housing, and medical care.

Johnson estimates that she was in almost $15,000 worth of debt, including her car note. Since completing the program nearly one year ago, she’s paid off about $5,000 worth of that debt.

“I’m still struggling,” she said. “But I had to get rid of some bad habits. I knew I needed to do something, but I just wasn’t motivated. This helped me to get focused.”

Johnson said she took the calendar from the class and divided it by payment periods. Each pay period she wrote down what needed to be paid and made sure she made those payments. She also started paying off her larger debts and those with the largest interest rate. Once they were paid, she applied that money to other debts. She also called up some of her creditors and asked them to change their due dates so they coincided with her paycheck.

“The things I learned in the class really helped me,” she said. “Some of the things they discussed I’d heard before and some were new to me. What was different was my attitude. I knew what I needed to do.”

Many of Johnson’s classmates also found the sessions helpful. Twenty of the participants in the class created a spending plan, and brought their money management calendars on the last day of class to show their progress. In addition, they shared the money saving tips they learned throughout the program and more than 60% of program participants reported they were currently saving at least 10% of their earnings. Participants also learned how to obtain their free credit report and more than 75% reported making wiser credit choices, including paying bills on time and paying more than the minimum balance. The program even motivated 85% of unbanked participants to open a checking account to make money management easier and their money more accessible.

But Johnson is also sharing the information she learned with friends and members of her family, including her children.

“Nobody talked to me about money when I was a child,” Johnson said. “I remember my grandmother said, ‘if you get a credit card, then cut it up.’ But it wasn’t credit cards that got me in trouble.

“I just made some bad choices,” she said of her credit mess. “Then I just realized that I was almost 40 years old, I didn’t have a house, and I didn’t have credit. I needed to do better. I kept saying I would get to it, but I never did on my own. I haven’t fully recovered. But I’m doing better.”

Johnson said her goal is to clean up her credit and one day become a homeowner. She also wants to make sure that she is patterning behavior that her children can follow.

“When they want something that I can’t get for them, I use that time to explain to them why having good credit is so important,” Johnson said. “I want them not to do what I did so they won’t have to do what I’m now doing.”

Nikita Johnson keeps all the information she got from the Consumer Score With Credit in Check Through Responsible Spending program in a folder near where she pays her bills. On top of the folder, covered with plastic, is the certificate Johnson got for completing the program.

“The certificate says I completed a money management class so when I look at it I tell myself, ‘now manage your money,’” Johnson said. “This just reminds me to stay focused.”

Johnson attended the eight-week course as part of a House-to-House Program created by Common Ground in Montgomery, Alabama. Common Ground is a faith-based, non-profit organization that seeks to create a safe and nurturing environment for families and provides education and outreach activities that focus on character, social, and life skills development for urban youth and the surrounding community.

The classes were taught by urban regional Extension staff using the Works for Me and Money Smart curricula that included role plays and real-life scenarios to engage participants and to encourage critical thinking.

Urban Regional Agent Metara Austin educating Montgomery residents about money management
Carol Stephens barely had time to mourn the untimely death of her husband before realizing what lay ahead.

“I had a daughter and a house that I had to take care of,” Stephens said. “I was now mom and dad and I was just going, going and going, and not thinking. I had to get things in order.”

Part of Mrs. Stephens’ order consisted of taking the Realizing the American Dream class provided through the Smart Home Buying and Foreclosure Prevention program offered by Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs. The eight-session course focused on a variety of topics ranging from personal money management to shopping for a home and getting a home loan.

Homeownership not only provides shelter and security for a family but has traditionally been considered a sign of having attained the American Dream. Homeowners are also thought to be more invested in their communities if for no other reason than to protect their investment. But as high under- and unemployment persists, getting or maintaining that home becomes more difficult.

That was the exact position Stephens was in. She and her husband had purchased a home some years ago. But his tragic death and the birth of her daughter left her in a bind. Insurance money made the house payments, but having the money to pay taxes and homeowners insurance and keeping the other expenses current, left Stephens unsure if she would be able to allow her daughter to stay in her childhood home.

“Sometimes we think we know what’s in the bank or what we have in our purse, but most of the time we really don’t know,” she said. “I was jumping rope and skipping and hoping to pay taxes on time and the insurance. There were so many issues.”

The interactive classes taught Stephens how to make a budget and to stay on that budget. As part of the class, each student got a handbook of educational materials including worksheets of each lesson. Stephens, who took the class almost a year ago, has kept her handbook and refers to it often and has used it to help coworkers, friends, and family.

“I filed the handbook with my bills,” Stephens said. “Some things stay fresh on your mind and others don’t. That’s why I keep the book. I go back to it from time to time. It’s my resource.”

Stephens sees Extension the same way — a resource. Stephens works with senior citizens and has often referred clients to Extension, but she did not know they offered money management classes.

“I was referring other people,” she said. “I hadn’t done all my homework; I didn’t know I needed to refer myself.”

In addition to making and keeping a budget, Stephens has become a coupon clipper. She gets them from the newspaper, but she also searches online for others. Having the coupons makes it possible to save on the things she was going to buy; but the coupons also help Stephens and her daughter splurge on things they normally couldn’t afford.

“Recently I had coupons to Red Lobster,” she said. “We went to Red Lobster and ate like pigs. Somebody asked if I was embarrassed to use the coupons in Red Lobster. They were crazy. That’s why they put the coupons in the paper so we would use them. Besides with the money we saved, we went to the movies the next weekend.”

Stephens has also used her new knowledge to help her father. Her mother, who always paid the bills and kept the household afloat, died and left her father confused. Stephens has helped her father learn how to budget his money and to keep everything current and paid.

“They both worked and paid their house off, and I don’t want him to get to a point that he can’t keep the house,” Stephens said. “Paying the bills was a new task for him. Previously, he just handed the money to my mom. But he’s turned over a new leaf, and he’s on track.

“I joke with him that my mother can’t be in heaven and back here paying the bills as well. We have used this time to bond. Rather than stressing, we both know our financial situations.”

Stephens is also making sure that her daughter who is now 12 is saving and that she understands the concept of staying within a budget.

“I let her know that you can’t go in a store to get chicken and instead buy steak,” she said. “She knows that if we can’t afford it, we leave it there.”

As well, Stephens wishes that the Alabama Cooperative Extension System would offer refresher classes.

“Sometimes you miss something the first time,” she said. “It’s like going to school, you may not get it all on round one. We all need to be reminded how to stay on a budget.”
Patsy Hatley is honest about the problem’s her family has had the past couple of years.

“We could give Dr. Phil enough subjects for a whole year,” said Hatley, 70, who along with her husband John, 71, are raising a grand and great-grand son. “Our problems haven’t been jail or drugs, what we’ve been through. John and I are just doing what’s best for the kids.”

But learning how to be parents again was a struggle for the Hatleys.

“We were in no man’s land,” Patsy Hatley said. “The people in our age group aren’t still raising children. They have been there and done that. And we didn’t fit in with the younger parents. We were just out there by ourselves.”

That’s when John Hatley saw an ad in the newspaper for the Relatives as Parents Program (RAPP), sponsored by Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs. RAPP started in Alabama in 2002, and offered a weekend retreat. John attended. Patsy stayed at home. John came back impressed and raving about the program and signed up for the monthly support group meetings. Patsy finally came along reluctantly. Both now sing RAPP praises.

“Extension has been a lifeline for us,” Patsy Hatley said. “I can’t imagine where we would be without them. Of course we would still have the children, but they have helped us learn how to hold on. How to cope and put up with all the things we had to go through. Just the opportunity to sit and talk with other people like us and to hear some of the speakers has been so helpful for us. I say it again, they have been a lifeline.”

According to the United States Census Bureau, 6 million children under the age of 18 are being raised by grandparents or other relatives. In Alabama, 12.8 percent of grandparents are raising grandchildren and in some counties that number goes up to 24 percent. Without grandparents or other relatives stepping in to take the place of parents, many of the children would find themselves in publically-supported facilities and/or part of the swelling foster care rolls.

Patsy Hartley says she doesn’t see that she and her husband had a choice about becoming parents again.

“A lot of people say what we are doing is wonderful,” Patsy Hatley said. “If we had adopted a handicapped child from India that would be wonderful. This is family. You have to do this.”

In addition to the grandson, who is headed off to college this year, the Hatleys also have a great grandson who is 9 and who Patsy Hatley calls a “poster child for ADD.” The grandson has been with them for 10 years and the younger great grandchild for almost five years. They have also had temporary custody of a great granddaughter and a granddaughter off-and-on.

“People say ‘I know having the children around keeps you young,’ ” Patsy Hatley said. “They don’t keep you young. We are still 70 and 71 no matter what.

“What does happen, no matter if you are raising grandchildren or caring for aging parents, is that you have to change how you do things. You have to change your lifestyle. You have to adapt.” Learning these lessons on coping and adapting is part of what Patsy Hatley said she got from her participation in RAPP. The support group offers sessions on family resource management, custody issues, stress management, coping skills, and parenting the second time around. They also get the opportunity to hear from professionals like attorneys, family therapists, health and nutritionists, and juvenile court officials.

“We are both retired now, and although we aren’t well off, we are comfortable,” Patsy Hatley said. “There are some people in the group with serious money problems. This has helped us put our situation in perspective. The information they have shared has helped us know how and where to get help. Even if they don’t know the answer, they can help us find the answer.”

Patsy Hatley found the attorney information useful and learned so much from the therapists.

“They have helped us emotionally and spiritually,” Patsy Hatley said. “Even some of our own family hasn’t understood what we are doing. They question why we are doing so much for some grandchildren and not all of them. But we are all they have. And if they needed we would do the same for them.”

In addition to participating in RAPP, the Hatleys’ great grandson has been a regular participant in 4-H. So much so, that before he finishes unpacking from the annual 4-H camp, he’s preparing for the next year.

The Hatleys have also used the information from RAPP to prepare for the future. Patsy Hatley has had some health problems this past year and she and John are also helping to care for John’s 97-year-old father. These kinds of issues worry the great grandson.

“I let him know that when his mama wasn’t able, God sent him grandma and when she wasn’t able, He sent me and Big Pa. And if something happens to me and Big Pa, God’s already got somebody to take care of him.”
At 69 Betty Craighead isn’t mistaken for a cheerleader. But if you happen to ask Craighead about the Alabama Cooperative Extension System’s Successful Aging Initiative (SAI), right before your very eyes you’d swear you were listening to Extension’s number one rooter.

“I’m their greatest fan,” said Craighead. “They have helped me. They have helped people in this community. They are very, very helpful.”

For 10 years, Craighead has been attending SAI programs coordinated by Extension’s Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs Unit. Craighead attends the session held at her home church, Union Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, but other sessions are held in urban areas across the state as well.

SAI, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2011, holds a one-day annual statewide conference that brings the various agencies together that deal with senior issues. Representatives from J. F. Drake State Technical College, from American Senior Assistance Programs, Inc. in Huntsville, and dozens of other agencies from funeral homes to credit unions—all with an interest in senior citizens—gather for a day focused on helping older adults with any concerns they might have.

As baby boomers age and live longer, vibrant and impactful senior programs are a necessity. Life expectancy in the United States has grown from 59.9 in 1941 to 77.9 in 2007, the latest numbers available. The United States Census Bureau projects that the age 85 and over population, often called the oldest old, could grow from 4.2 million in 2000 to 19 million by 2050. Senior citizens who are 85 years of age and older not only represent the fastest growing segment of the population, they also have unique needs.

Alabama ranks forty-ninth among the country’s 50 states and the District of Columbia when it comes to life expectancy. Alabama is right behind Louisiana and just ahead of West Virginia and Mississippi. Alabama’s life expectancy is 75.8 years. As well, 45% of those in Alabama over age 60 has at least one disability.

Knowing this information Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs staff knew there was much work to be done in this state, especially through the Urban Centers where life expectancy among the minority populations is even lower; thus the development of the SAI. Care is taken to select and involve those organizations and entities who can offer help and assistance to seniors in attendance. Data collected at each SAI helps to make sure that each year’s programs are designed to meet the needs, answer the questions, and even introduce something new to the attendees. That may be why each year’s program continues to grow. Last year’s program at Union Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in Huntsville attracted more than 900 older adults and senior-friendly vendors.

Craighead and her husband have developed a will and a power of attorney as a result of attending the sessions. Craighead also got information that helped her deal with her mother’s Alzheimer’s disease.

SAI has become something that community residents expect and anticipate.
Forestry, Wildlife, and Natural Resource Management

Once the habitat was completed, Laurence worked with the school’s principal, school board, and other teachers to develop a curriculum for each of the school’s pre-kindergarten through eighth grades. So not only is the garden attractive, but it offers hands-on teaching lessons for the school’s 200 students in math and sciences, areas where this country’s students are falling behind.

“Teaching something like the different types of soil is so abstract,” Laurence said. “But when the students can go out in the garden and see all the different kinds of soils, it helps their learning. It moves it from the textbook to reality. It reinforces their learning.”

When Urban Regional Extension Agent Denise Heubach, a former teacher herself, learned about The Habitat, she knew that part of her environmental awareness and science appreciation program would work perfectly at Little Flower.

In 2011, Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs introduced a youth component of its Urban Environmental Science Education Program called Youth Exploring Environmental Sciences (YEeS) with a focus on water quality and quantity, natural resources and the environment, forestry, wildlife and ecology, and energy and waste management. Little Flower was the perfect place to pilot YEeS.

“Denise knew I was interested in the environment, so we connected,” Laurence said. “She brought so many activities to us, and her intervention has been well received. We have an excellent partnership.”

Heubach has made presentations on the importance of soil, landfill reduction, vermicomposting, and the benefits of composting. She has provided each classroom with a compost bucket and held instructional workshops on composting. The resulting compost has been used to enhance the garden’s soil.

Extension has also provided other programs on electronic waste management and wildlife. Little Flower students have also participated in the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association’s program Classroom in the Forest, designed to teach youth about forestry management and natural resources.

“What Extension has to offer has been valuable,” Laurence said. “And all of this has helped us as teachers. This all makes science and math fun and alive. It’s hands-on instead of just being in their minds. Seeing the parts of the plant rather than just talking about the parts of the plant brings the lesson to life.”

At one point, Little Flower students planned, designed, and calculated the dimensions for building a small pond near The Habitat. For safety reasons, the pond was filled in, but the math lessons won’t be erased.

“We still have students who have left the school seven, eight, nine years ago, that come by asking about and wanting to see the garden,” Laurence said. “This was a project where the students did the work. They pulled weeds. They dug the dirt. They fed the birds. And they learned so much about the environment and science and how to appreciate their environment. It was more than just a garden. And the YEeS program and activities enhanced their learning.”

As the school year starts again, Laurence and the Little Flower family will begin their ninth year of tending to The Habitat. Weeds are being pulled. Plants are being tended. New lessons will be taught, and another group will get a better understanding of and appreciation for science, math, and environmental stewardship.
Within a few weeks after planting residents were able to harvest collards, tomatoes, cucumbers, okra, beans, and peas. All free and available on a first come, first serve basis. The fresh vegetables fed their bodies, but the pastor and members of King Hill Missionary Baptist Church, also located in the community, made sure they learned how to feed their spirit and soul.

This summer, Pastor Jeff Owens held his weekly Wednesday night Bible study in the garden. His lessons focused on how tilling the soil, adding the right minerals, careful planting, tending and harvesting of the garden is akin to caring for the physical, emotional, and spiritual body.

“It was a little hot out there most nights, but we got used to the heat and loved the message that Rev. Owens was bringing in and about the garden,” said Mary Ann Myles, a member of the church and the director of the King Hill Community Development Corporation. “This garden became more than just a garden. It became about cultivating and weeding King Hill.”

Myles, who doesn’t live in King Hill but has a passion for wanting to improve the community, said she first called Urban Regional Extension Agent Roosevelt Robinson and learned about the Urban Gardens and Sustainable Landscapes program.

“We met with Roosevelt and learned about other resources Extension had to offer,” she said. “Roosevelt didn’t just talk about resources, but he got in there and helped us find the resources. Then we got the water hookup from the city. This has just made all the difference. Things would have been so much harder without the initial guidance from the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.”

Extension’s efforts in grounds, gardens and home pests are designed to increase the use and availability of fresh fruits and vegetables, improve the appearance of the urban landscape, and increase physical activity. All of that and more happened in King Hill.

King Hill residents laying the foundation for a plasticulture garden

King Hill wasn’t what it used to be. The urban blight that can creep in a neighborhood and take over like overgrown weeds had slowly, but surely taken root.

Drugs. An overabundance of limited-income residents. Single-parent homes. Unwed mothers were all thriving and surviving in King Hill. But all wasn’t lost.

Last year, with the King Hill Community Development Corporation as lead, an effort was started to cultivate and till the soil and eliminate the weeds. The group, aided by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System’s Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs Unit, the Department of Agriculture and Industries and the Montgomery City Council, established a plasticulture community garden in King Hill, a community near downtown Montgomery. All materials and supplies for the King Hill Community plasticulture garden, including the land, were donated, and the city made sure a steady supply of water was available.

Plasticulture is a way of growing plants using raised beds that are covered in wide strips of black plastic. Drip irrigation lines are laid beneath the plastic, and vegetables are planted through small holes made in the plastic. Using plastic and drip irrigation reduces weeds but more important, it increases production.

The Urban Difference

Home Grounds, Gardens & Home Pests

Myles’ husband donated the family’s tools, including an old tractor to till the land and lay the plastic, and about 60 community residents, including 20 that worked throughout the process, made sure the garden was planted, tended, and harvested.

“We learned we can work on our own destiny,” Myles said.

Rev. Owens, who came to the church about two years ago, has given the church members a mission, Myles said. He wants the church to work in the community to create change, to promote healthy eating, to develop a place where young and old can get together, and to get people talking, she added.

“He wants us to be a lighthouse and to shed that light to others,” Myles said. “The garden became an ideal tool for this work. The garden became a laboratory. It’s a work in progress, but this is just the beginning.”

Next year, Myles is hoping to include programming that will get more young people involved in the garden. She wants to have more conversations around healthy eating and obesity.

“We need to look at developing the whole man,” she said. “We want the community to realize that just like this garden, if you don’t cultivate the soil, you get weeds. We want the community to see itself being cultivated and tilled and changed. This is just the beginning.”

Myles said she is well aware of what some of the residents feel. She had her first child at 15. By the time she was 22, she had four children.

“I realized I needed to get my GED, and then I got my associate degree in nursing,” she said, adding that eventually she got her bachelor’s degree. “I’m a living example that you pull yourself up from where you are and get to where you want to be. You can have a purpose for your life. You have to start somewhere. This is the start.”
At 59, Wilma Fitzpatrick knew she needed to make some changes. She was 50 pounds overweight. She was a diabetic, with arthritis bothering her knees, and her blood pressure was high. She knew she needed to get her health issues under control. But doing so was another story.

Then a coworker told her about CHAMPION, a health and wellness program offered through Extension’s Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs Unit.

CHAMPION, or its longer name The Community Health Aerobic and Motivational Program Initiating Optimal Nutrition, was designed for people just like Fitzpatrick—wanting to improve their overall health by changing eating habits and engaging in physical activity.

“After I talked to my coworker I decided I would try the program,” Fitzpatrick said. “It sounded good, and I liked the fact that I could work at my own pace. I hadn’t done any exercise in 10 years so I needed to start slow. I didn’t want to go to a place where I would be shamed that I couldn’t keep up.”

Fitzpatrick said she traveled from her home to the site, which is about 30 minutes away, and worked up to the point where she lost 20 pounds.

“I had to work really hard in the beginning, but I worked up to where I could keep up,” Fitzpatrick said. “I hadn’t moved some of these parts in years. But once I got started, I realized then that my knees didn’t hurt as bad. I know I need to do more, but this made me start to feel pretty good.”

Fitzpatrick, who said her goal is to lose 50 pounds and to get control of her diabetes and high blood pressure, had to miss out on many of the nutrition sessions. But she has appreciated the regular e-mail she’s gotten from the program.

“These e-mails have helped me stay focused,” she said.

Transportation problems and an aching knee have kept Fitzpatrick on the sidelines lately, but her goal is to go back to CHAMPION.

“I probably could have afforded to pay for a program, but it would have been a sacrifice,” Fitzpatrick said. “Having this program by Extension is a help to us, and it was good for me. I’m going back. In the short time I was there, it made a difference in my life.

“I’ve already called to make sure that I can come back. I need this. The community needs this.”

CHAMPION was started to work with some of the state’s neediest citizens—those with chronic or the potential for chronic health issues that require a lifestyle change. The program targets youth, adults, and seniors. In addition to exercise, including using chairs and resistance bands, program participants learn about including different types of fruits and vegetables in their diets all with the desire to reduce their visits to the doctor for chronic disease care. Those decreased visits mean less use of the state’s fragile Medicare and Medicaid programs or frequent use of emergency room visits for chronic disease management and care.

Fitzpatrick said although she lost 20 pounds, she is still working on her diet so she can get her diabetes and blood pressure under control.

“I’m a bad patient,” she said, “But I’m working on all of that. “I started by getting a little exercise in my day. All I did at work was sit. So this got me moving. And I was good at it.”

Urban Affairs and New Programs also offers nutrition, diet and health courses for youth and families.
James Johnson made his usual trek to the rec center with one goal in mind – shooting a game of pool with whoever was around. But one day about six months ago, he found out about a different game.

“This lady came to the rec center and started talking about healthy foods, so I decided to listen to what she had to say,” said Johnson. “I don’t know what made me listen, but I did.”

Johnson not only listened, but he internalized the information and realized that a lot of what he had been eating over all of his life was killing him. The starches and fats and salt and sugar were doing him in. And he had no idea that what he was eating had a direct result on some of his physical conditions or that he could practice preventive care.

“I came in for a game of pool and she popped in on me,” he said. “She sank the eight ball that day.”

As a result, Johnson used the information to change his entire diet.

“Very little rice, no white bread, little white potatoes, little sugar, no salt, no spicy foods, just the egg white and no fats,” Johnson said. “Food is already salty enough. You don’t need to add more salt. You are hiding the taste. I’ve learned to taste my food and to eat right.”

Johnson has been participating in the Urban Nutrition Education Program (UNEP) that uses the Wise Eating Approaches for a Lifetime of Health (WEALTH) curriculum offered at the James Seal Jr. Park and Recreation Center in Mobile. The program is conducted by the Urban Center in Mobile County and was developed by health and nutrition staff at Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs.

UNEP, funded by the United States Department of Agriculture’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education, is designed to help individuals and families make wise food choices, prepare safe and healthier meals, practice food safety strategies, and increase physical activity to maintain a healthy weight in an effort to reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and diabetes.

Alabama’s health statistics are well documented and many of the state’s health-related disparities have links to dietary habits and physical inactivity. In fact, poor diet and nutrition are recognized as risk factors for ill health and premature death. Many of the people with multiple health issues find themselves on the state’s publically funded Medicare and Medicaid rosters and seek their health care in high-costs emergency rooms. Nutrition education can help people make better food and lifestyle choices and reduce rising health-care costs.

As a result, Johnson said he’s seen a change in how he feels. The foods he’s eating are digesting and he has more energy. He’s even walking to the senior center now for his daily pool games. He’s also considering what other changes he might like to make.

“I want to eat spinach and sauerkraut,” he said. “Both are so healthy. But I just don’t like the taste. I’m not trying to be Popeye or anything. I just want to eat right.”

Johnson said he’s grateful for UNEP and the difference it has made in his life and lifestyle.

“I welcome these kinds of programs and I’m glad they are bringing them to us,” he said. “I didn’t know anything about preventative care. All I knew was cornbread and white lima beans and potatoes. But all that’s wrong. It’s all wrong.

“I also learned that I could have anything in moderation. But I tell you I’d rather not have it at all. I don’t fool with the bad stuff now. I eat right and my body is functioning right.”

“Yeah, yeah, they talked to me about this before,” he said. “I heard it. But this time they explained it to me. The lady would come in and talk to us and we asked questions and then she would let us participate. We could taste the stuff she was talking about.”

“Before it was all talk. This time we were doing and it stuck with me.”

So excited about all he heard, Johnson went home after each session to share with his wife his newly-learned knowledge.

“We had a few quarrels as I started to tell her how to cook and prepare the food,” Johnson said. “You know a woman does not want another woman in her kitchen and she sure didn’t want me in there. But I was patient. And slowly she has come around. It’s to the point now we are about ready to start shopping in the health food store.”

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Hill, who is a high school senior, wants to become a pastry chef so the lessons on healthy lifestyles resonated with him. And because his mother is a diabetic, the lessons not only helped him, but became useful information he could take home and share with the rest of his family. “My mom liked the cauliflower so much, she’s eating it in salads now,” Hill said.

Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs offers additional youth development activities through the Decatur Youth Services Department, such as Health Rocks!™, a national program sponsored by the National 4-H Council. Like Teens Making Impact, Health Rocks!™ focuses on decision making and is designed to help young people learn skills such as critical thinking, managing stress, handling peer pressure, and communicating effectively. However, special emphasis is given to avoiding the use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs that are likely to cause harm or addiction.

National research shows that Health Rocks!™ is highly successful in educating youth. The National 4-H Council reported that 96% of the youth participants increased their knowledge of the risks and consequences associated with tobacco use, 93% increased their knowledge about other risky behaviors, and 96% of the participants said that they personally disapprove of tobacco, drug, and alcohol abuse. Additional research also showed that youth involved in youth development programs like Health Rocks!™ increase their academic achievement in secondary school and their college attendance rates. On the other hand, students who drop out of high school are more likely to live in poverty and receive some type of government assistance.

So participating in urban Extension youth development programs can make a difference for participants.

Churmell Mitchell hasn’t forgotten the lessons he learned in Health Rocks!™. He not only used the lessons he learned on drug and alcohol abuse as guidelines for his own life, but he still uses those lessons now that he is a mentor at the Decatur Youth Services Program and as a youth leader in his church. “The lessons on drug abuse opened my eyes,” Mitchell said. “They talked about how smoking marijuana could help rot out your teeth and because I want pretty teeth and I want to attract young ladies, those lessons made an impact on me.

“I come from a neighborhood where the negative side of drugs wasn’t stressed. I hadn’t heard some of these messages before so when I heard them talking about how drugs kill off your brain cells, I didn’t want to be dumb. I clearly heard what they were saying.”

Because of his home life, Mitchell said nobody ever told him some of the things he heard as part of Health Rocks!™.

“I love my parents but they never pushed me,” said Mitchell. “They didn’t help me make good choices. I never even knew what a good choice was. My mother would ask me about my grades, but she never looked at my report card. She accepted what I said. She didn’t try to push me.”

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System staff also gave Mitchell something else he’d never heard. “They told me that I could be successful,” he said.

Story continued on next page ...
Jefferson County students engaged in Welcome to the Real World simulations

“They told me that I could do what I set out to do. That made an impact on me then and I never forgot what they told me. My job now is to tell this to other young people. Other young people who are in the same situation I was in. Other young people who just need someone to tell them that they can be better than what they see around them.”

Mitchell, who is attending Decatur Community College, hopes to attend Auburn University in the fall. His desire is to become a physical therapist and to create a better life for his family.

“One time in Welcome to the Real World, another Extension program, we talked about money,” Mitchell said. “I was asked if I had some money would I buy something I wanted or pay a bill. I took that lesson to heart.

“Shortly after that I brought my first pair of Jordan’s. About 10 minutes later I took them back to the store and got my money back. I couldn’t see paying that much for shoes. The next day, I used that money to help my mother get some medicines that she needed. She hadn’t talked to me about saving, but I got that message from the urban Extension program Welcome to the Real World.”

Welcome to the Real World provokes the user to think about career selections, personal financial matters, and other life processes.

Jena Maforah didn’t have the opportunity to participate in Health Rocks!™, but after a summer of volunteering with the program she saw the difference that it had on the participants and the difference that it had on her.

“The joy of watching the young people, including the older ones, learn and participate was invaluable,” said Maforah. “I like giving back but I also was enriched by being involved in Health Rocks!™.”

Maforah was a participant in Alabama A&M University’s Service Learning Network, which is part of the Volunteer in Urban Programs, better known as VIP. The desire is that A&M students would become engaged in the community and put into action the material they have talked about in the classroom. In essence it’s an opportunity to live what they learn and to give back to their community.

In 2011, 2,041 students participated in the Service Learning Network donating 52,076 hours at 73 community organizations throughout the state.

Maforah, who recently got her graduate degree from Alabama A&M in human development and family studies, has a desire to operate a non-profit organization. The details of that organization are still in the works, but Health Rocks!™ gave Maforah a good foundation.

“A lot of how the program was developed and how it was delivered will help me,” she said.

“The experience of volunteering and working in the community and working behind the scenes to see how it all comes together will make a difference for me as I move forward. I’m not sure where I will be located, but I know I will rely on all I learned.”

The Urban Difference

Morgan County Health Rocks!™ group

Jefferson County students engaged in Welcome to the Real World simulations
2011-2012 Urban Extension Programs

Animal Sciences and Forages
- Alabama Ethnic Food Security Network
- AEFSN Annual Spring Forum
- Annual Small Ruminant Conference

Consumer Science & Personal Financial Management
- Promoting Readiness for Employment Possibilities
- Consumers Score with Credit in Check Through Responsible Spending

Economic & Community Development
- Welcome to the Real World: Career Exploration and Educational Planning
- Career Countdown
- Virtual Minority Business Development (Minoritymall.com)
- Partnerships for Economic Development
- Smart Home Buying and Foreclosure Prevention

Family and Child Development
- Family Advocacy through Caring Engagement Strategies
- Grand Parenting Program (formerly the Relatives as Parents Program)
- Successful Aging Initiative
- LegalEase

Forestry, Wildlife, & Natural Resource Management
- Urban Home-a-Syst Program
- Urban Environmental Science Education Program
- Youth Exploring Environmental Sciences (YEeS)
- AAMU/ACES E-Waste Institute
- Green Living Expo*

Home Grounds, Gardens & Home Pests
- Urban Gardens and Sustainable Landscapes
- Water Wheels Outdoor Conservation Lab

Human Nutrition, Diet & Health
- Families United Through Nutrition
- Community Health, Aerobic, and Motivational Program
- Initiating Optimal Health
- Urban Nutrition Education Program
- Urban Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program

4-H and Youth Development & Volunteerism
- 4H Health Rocks!™
- Teens Making Impact
- Volunteer in Urban Programs
- Living Interactive Family Education
- Ready? Get Set to Explore Forensics!
- Service Learning Network

*International Topiary Horticulturist Pearl Fryar of Bishopville, South Carolina was the guest speaker at the Green Living Expo 2011, an event designed to educate consumers on how to be eco-friendly in order to sustain the environment and Alabama’s natural resources.

For more information about programs that Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs offers, please visit www.aces.edu/urban, call Dr. Jannie Carter at (256) 372-4943, or download the publication UNP-0136: Urban Extension Programs Initiatives at ACES at http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/U/UNP-0136/.
The Urban Difference in Numbers

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**Total program contacts for 2010-2011**

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Direct contacts occur when program participants are actively engaged in a research-based learning process, while indirect contacts involve the distribution of educational information via print or electronic media such as publications, the Internet, or materials that are distributed at public events.
2011-2012 Urban Affairs Staff

Urban Administrators
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Jannie Carter, Assistant Director

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Shannon Murray
Cheryl Stevens

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Cynarra Fuller

Program Assistant
Rhonda Britten

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Manuela Febles
Darryl Madden

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Tamatha Gibson