Trees on the Auburn campus are beginning to turn red and gold as we enter fall — a season of change. We in ACES are also entering a season of change. Long-time ACES leaders will be retiring soon, even as we welcome Sam Fowler as the new associate director for rural and traditional programs. The merger at the state level of NEP and EFNEP, now ACENEP, began in October. New Extension team projects are being initiated, while others are reaching fruitful conclusions.

Some folks find change disturbing, but change is really more exciting than worrisome.

In October, we discussed ways to implement the 2002 ACES Strategic Plan. We are going to have to make changes to attain these goals, but I encourage you to view these changes as exciting possibilities.

Our organization has a long history of adapting and changing. We are changing to meet new program demands. We are adapting new staffing strategies to better serve our clients.

If our organization had not been changing and adapting over the years, you would probably find me, as Director Davis did in 1941, using this column to congratulate some county on the number of kudzu crowns planted.

No organization can survive and remain useful without change. We will be talking more about the exact type of changes and adjustments we will be implementing to realize our vision of transforming ACES from a solid organization into one of world-class caliber.

Last month, Gov. Don Siegelman issued a proclamation naming Oct. 21 as Children’s Environmental Health Day. It also recognized ACES and the Environmental Protection Agency’s work to develop a community-driven approach to meeting the environmental health needs of children and families. Many thanks for a job well done to Laura Booth, Extension associate in environmental programs; Gwen Lewis, Shannon Andress, and Yvonne Thomas, Montgomery County Extension agents; and Judy Brown, Montgomery County Extension coordinator.

Congratulations to the Forestry Program of Alabama A&M University’s School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences on their accreditation from the Society of American Foresters! This is the first such accredited program at a historically black college or university.

My thanks to all who helped make the Alabama Farmers Federation’s Goat and Sheep Field Day a success. More than 300 people attended the field day at Alabama A&M University’s Winfred Thomas Ag Research Station.

Congratulations to Katie Jackson, multicounty EFNEP agent! Katie received the National Distinguished Service Award from her colleagues in the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences.

Many thanks to all the county Extension agents and specialists who helped 4-H’ers participate and succeed at the many fairs this fall! I know you spent many hours with these young people when you could have been with your families. I appreciate your work with our young people.

Thanksgiving is just around the corner, and each of us has a great deal for which to be thankful. I want to offer you my thanks for your hard work and commitment to our organization and my best wishes for a joyous and restful holiday with family and loved ones.
Editor's Note: Our Program Highlight story usually showcases a recent program with demonstrable and immediate results. With some Extension programs, however, the results only become clear years later. This month's Program Highlight is one such story.

Program Highlight: 4-H Making a Difference

In the aftermath of the September 2001 terrorist attacks, most Americans reeled in the wake of the resulting confusion and chaos. When several people died of anthrax inhalation in the following weeks, hysteria reached a new high. All over America, people scrambled desperately to design plans, systems and ways to respond if biological warfare broke out.

But in Birmingham, Glenn Phillips was quietly and calmly tweaking a system already in place. It was not long before he had made sure all the hospitals in the Birmingham metropolitan area had a bioterrorism alert system.

Six years ago, Phillips, a former Alabama 4-H’er and current president of Forté Incorporated, developed a computer networking system called LifeTrac. An engineer with a degree from Auburn University, Phillips started Forté in 1991. In 1997, emergency medical technicians in the Birmingham area asked him to create a system to quickly and efficiently route trauma victims to the nearest hospital that could take them.

And that’s just what Phillips and his staff did. The result was LifeTrac, which currently links 13 hospitals in the six-county Birmingham metropolitan area, home to about 50 percent of the state’s population.

Three years later, Phillips and the Forté staff added more capabilities, this time to assist stroke patients. This year they upgraded the system to include a bioterrorism alert.

“The system was originally created for trauma patients,” Phillips said. “With this system, if someone is severely injured in a car accident, all the EMT has to do is call the computer and find out which hospital has room for the patient and is best suited for that patient’s injuries. Before, the EMT just took the patient to whichever hospital was closest.”

Unfortunately, that hospital was often too busy to attend immediately to the victim or was not properly equipped or staffed for his or her injuries. Since LifeTrac has been implemented, it has been estimated that the mortality rate of severe trauma victims has been reduced 50 percent.

After the terrorist attacks, Phillips used the same idea to install a bioterrorism alert system. The computer system monitors the hospitals and alerts them if too many of them are seeing too many patients with the same complaints.

“It provides a very, very early warning system that lets hospitals and officials know if there is a problem,” he says. “The system looks for things that are unusual. For instance, if too many hospitals have too many resources that are busy, it triggers an alert. Our system then gets more information from the hospitals to determine if this is just a routine case of something going around or if maybe biological or chemical warfare is to blame.”

Phillips has been in contact with local, state and national officials about the bioterrorism alert system. The original LifeTrac is still the only system in the world of its kind. Phillips is hoping his system can serve as a model for others.

“We’ve spoken with people from state government, U.S. Congressmen and Senators, the U.S. Army, and the Federal Emergency Management Administration,” Phillips says. “They’ve all pointed out that we are way ahead of everybody with our system.”

Phillips credits his 4-H experience as an aid in helping him reach the success he enjoys today. Growing up in tiny Bear Creek, Phillips says he noticed at a young age that 4-H could be exciting.

“We had a fantastic 4-H program,” he says. “It was pretty common for our 4-H’ers to go to National Congress every year. I grew up thinking, ‘Whoa, look at what they’re doing.’”

Then he grew up and did it all himself.

Phillips was active in Marion County’s 4-H club programs for eight years, participating in public speaking and electronic demonstrations and entering his record book in competitions. He won first in the state in the electronic demonstration and electric record book categories, held a local office and served as a county junior leader. He also served a stint as a state officer.

“I really enjoyed my time in 4-H,” Phillips says. “I use the things I learned every day — the public speaking skills, the record book, the electronic demonstration. I speak to groups and give presentations, I keep records — everything I did in 4-H was great experience for me.”
Phillips says 4-H provided opportunities for him he couldn’t have gotten any other way.

“For a kid growing up in rural Alabama, 4-H was a great way to see other parts of the country and meet new people,” he says. “I traveled with 4-H to Washington, D.C., North Carolina and Chicago. It was great to get out and see the world and realize that the rest of the world is not like rural Alabama. I made friends around the country. I wouldn’t trade it for anything.”

Lisa Cunningham Murphy, Marion County Extension agent, remembers Phillips well.

“He was amazing,” she says. “He participated in everything we offered. His knowledge base and how well he could relate with both kids and adults was really astounding. He was a leader in the county.”

Phillips didn’t like the forms for the record book, so he made his own. His were so good that they were copied and sent to every county in the state.

Murphy says he would usually leave information out of his demonstrations so the judges would be forced to ask him questions about it.

“He did that on purpose so he could talk about his demonstration with them,” she says. “He was just like that. But he wasn’t just good at 4-H. He was very well rounded. He was very musical. He was a special individual.”

Phillips played the tuba in the Auburn University band and still plays in the school’s alumni marching band. He is also a freelance photographer, whose work appears in numerous publications, including national magazines and sports media guides.

Last year, he was named Businessperson of the Year by the Shelby County Chamber of Commerce and was recognized by the Birmingham Business Journal as one of the city’s Top 40 Under 40.

In addition to many other volunteer endeavors, Phillips is still active in 4-H, serving as a volunteer judge at the local and district levels.

“I am really thankful for my time in 4-H,” he says. “It was a great experience for me. I’m still using so many of the things I learned in 4-H. I use them every day.”

PERSONNEL

Kudos:
• Chris McClendon, Supervisor, ACES Personnel Office, on her election as Secretary of the Alabama Chapter of the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources

Appointments:
• Newathea Hill, Agent Assistant I, Ft. Rucker, Oct. 1

Transfer:
• Janice Hall, County Extension Agent—ACENEP, from Tuscaloosa County to Montgomery County, Oct. 1

ACES FAMILY HAPPENINGS
• Condolences to Mary McLean, Coffee County Administrative Secretary, whose father died Oct. 2
• Our sympathy to Janice Harper, Jefferson County Extension Agent, whose brother-in-law, James Earl Beckham, passed away Oct. 4
• Congratulations to Stephanie Woodyard, Multi-county Extension Agent, Escambia County, on the birth of her son, Peyton Tyler Woodyard, Oct. 8
• Condolences to Tammy Belcher, Jefferson County Agent Assistant, on the death of her mother, Wanda Reid, Oct. 18
• Our sympathy to Curtis Grissom, Limestone County Extension Coordinator, whose father, Earl Grissom, died Oct. 24

Proposals Approved:
• Martha Johnson and Kathleen Tajeu, USDA for Sustainability for Healthy People Healthy Communities, $100,000

Proposals Submitted:
• Jeannie Hollinger and Wendy Padget to Thomasville City Schools for Character Counts, $10,000
• Rick Wallace to Southern Regional Aquaculture Center for Publication–Culture of Gulf Killfish, $1,000
• Marilee Tankersley to Elmore County Board of Education for 4-H At-Risk School Enrichment Program, $74,825

Gaines Smith, Interim Director