Columbus City Council member Jerry "Pops" Barnes was honored by the Georgia Council on Aging at a state Capitol luncheon as this year’s Distinguished Older Georgian. The GCOA selected Barnes, 76, for his advocacy on state and national issues relevant to older adults and his commitment to improving the lives of seniors, especially in the area of healthcare. Barnes said he is deeply appreciative of the award but, "the bottom line is to be in a position to do things for people," and he thanked Co-Age for nominating him for the award. He was recognized on February 13th as part of the Georgia Council on Aging’s Senior Week activities.
Smithsonian Exhibit Comes to Randolph County

Out of hundreds of applicants, Cuthbert (Randolph County) was chosen to host the Celebrate Rural America! Exhibition in 2020. Crossroads: Change in Rural America is a museum on main Street exhibition sponsored by the Smithsonian Institute, the Georgia Humanities Council, the Georgia EMC’s, and funded by the U.S. Congress. The exhibition showcases rural areas and people in photos, videos and artifacts from across the United States. Objects from Cuthbert and Randolph County history also supplement the Smithsonian displays. Cuthbert is the fourth destination of the exhibit from January 18, 2020 – February 29, 2020.

In Memoriam

River Valley Regional Commission mourns the loss of our dear friend and colleague, Gail Renee Boston Simpson, who departed her earthly life on December 28, 2019. Gail was a true servant leader who was full of life and touched many lives throughout the Chattahoochee Valley. As a dedicated employee, she provided almost twenty-five years of loyal service to the Commission. She began her employment as the receptionist in 1995 and had been the fiscal analyst for the Area Agency on Aging for the past twenty years. Gail was very active in the community as a member of Nazareth Missionary Baptist Church, the Columbus Chapter of Jack and Jill of America, Inc., New Ladies of Columbus Chapter-Order of the Eastern Star, Modern Free and Accepted Masonic Organization, Sisters in Sync, W.H. Spencer High School Alumni Association, and several other civic and community organizations. She truly loved serving others and regularly volunteered her time to do so. In addition to her regular job duties, she had recently completed training as a Certified Tai Chi instructor and taught several Tai Chi classes at the Senior Centers within the River Valley Region. The River Valley Regional Commission staff extends our deepest condolences to Gail’s family and will continue to cherish her memory forever in our hearts.

From The Desk of the Executive Director

COVID-19

We hope that your community has adapted to social distancing and been able to adjust to the new challenges of COVID-19. While the information and terrain changes daily, the RVRC is taking measures to adapt and remain flexible in order to continue to serve the Region.

Administration

We have allowed staff to work from home, while maintaining a skeletal crew in both the Americus and Columbus offices. We are not seeing visitors at either office as of now, but we are taking phone calls and all staff can respond by email. Your normal methods of communication with us should not be interrupted.

Aging Department

All Senior Centers that we work with in the region are closed: The Aging and Disability Resource Connection lines are open and working with eligible participants to connect them to services. If you have seniors in your community who need services, please direct them there first. The ADRC Hot line is 706-256-2900 or 1-800-615-4379. Home Delivered Meals are continuing and becoming a more important component of our work. Again, please let us know if you have referrals for people in your community who would need these services.

Planning Department

The deadline for CDBG applications has been pushed back to May 1. The state and DGA has also pushed back the deadlines for several reports and audits local governments are responsible for. Look for information on that from DGA. If you have any questions, please let us know. For those communities writing CDBG applications this year, we are pressing ahead to try and complete them as quickly as possible. We are also continuing to work on our other planning projects like pre-disaster mitigation plans and comprehensive plans. The planners will continue to be in touch with you about these projects.

Transportation Department

Transit services continue to operate. Buses are being sanitized every day and serving clients throughout the region as of today. Some transit trips are assisting with home delivered meals to seniors who cannot attend the senior centers.

Workforce Innovation

WIOA services are still being offered, but with the changes in both employers’ and educators’ schedules, delivery of those services are challenged. WIOA Regional Plans are due later in 2020, and staff is actively working to develop those plans.

Finally, we are getting word on different federal programs that are becoming available to help with the financial challenges associated with the COVID-19 outbreak. Small Business Administration loans for businesses and other federal programs are being developed to help. We will continue to forward this information to you and post on social media.

If you have any questions that you think we would be able to help with, please ask. We are open, will continue to work, and want to help.

Jim Livingston
Executive Director
The City of Oglethorpe has recently created a Downtown Development Authority and hired Natalie Bradley as the first Executive Director. Mrs. Bradley approached RVRC staff about facilitating a strategic planning session for the new organization to identify priorities and potential activities. On January 21, 2020, Allison Slocum, Historic Preservation Planner, met with around 40 stakeholders in Oglethorpe. Allison led the group in an exercise to determine the boundaries of downtown Oglethorpe and identify their favorite parts and their not-so-favorite parts of downtown. The group spent the main portion of the evening discussing and listing the strengths and weaknesses of downtown Oglethorpe as well as the opportunities and threats approaching the community.

On January 25, 2020, Andrew College, located in Cuthbert, held a ribbon cutting for the grand re-opening of Warren Bush Hall. The building was completely renovated and now houses seven new classrooms, 11 faculty offices, student study space, and the nursing program. Warren Bush Hall, originally opened in 1901, had been closed for over 15 years. With a low-interest loan from USDA Rural Development, the building is a great way for local governments to maintain compliance, timeliness and making sure all local governments who submit applications are fully compliant. This will be important for all local governments to maintain their eligibility for state funding. This has required staff to put more resources towards making sure the communities staff are working to remain compliant. This will be important for all local governments to maintain their eligibility for state funding.

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The River Valley Regional Commission partnered with Safe Kids Columbus, Sumter Cycling, and Reynolds Ramblers to host four bicycle helmet giveaways in the month of December. Over 400 children received helmets and 14 bicycles were given away in Reynolds. Volunteers fitted each child for their helmet and provided them with safety information. The use of bicycle helmets can prevent anywhere between 85% and 88% of traumatic head and brain injuries. If every child between the ages of 4 and 15 wears a bicycle helmet, children can avoid between 39,000 to 45,000 head injuries annually.

USDA Investment in Andrew College

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Reynolds Bicycle Helmet Giveaway - Michelle Gee fits local child with a helmet during the giveaway in Reynolds on December 15.

Bike Helmet Giveaways

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RVRC staff is currently working with eleven (11) communities to pursue a 2020 CDBG application. These projects range from septic tank replacements in Cordele to housing rehabilitation in Talbot County. CDBG funding is a critical way local governments are able to address infrastructure issues in the region. Water problems, sewer issues, and flooding are key issues that this source of funding can be used to help low and moderate income persons in the community.

Applications this year have been a little different than in years past. The Department of Community Affairs has put an emphasis on compliance, timeliness and making sure all local governments who submit applications are fully compliant. This will be important for all local governments to maintain their eligibility for state funding. This has required staff to put more resources towards making sure the communities staff are working to remain compliant. This will be important for all local governments to maintain their eligibility for state funding. As always, the projects that score the best for CDBG funding are the ones with the best photographs of the issues. If you see problems, please get pictures to help tell the story for a CDBG application.
Mr. Barfield explained that he listed as a contact for Mr. Malone. After receiving the referral, the ADRC counselor assisted by himself. They felt that he would need some extra assistance living and they felt that he would be able to go on the waiting list for Homemaker and Home Delivered meals. He has since started receiving both services. He was also linked with Natalie Prater, ADRC Resource Specialist with DBHDD, to be assessed for service through DBHDD.

Through the collaboration of Adult Protect Services, the ADRC and DBHDD, Mr. Malone has found safe and stable housing, regular nutritious meals, assistance with maintaining the cleanliness of his home and hopefully on-going services to help him continue to live independently for as long as possible.

Tai Chi Classes
Schley County Seniors

Seated Tai Chi for Arthritis, developed by Dr. Paul Lam, began eight consecutive week sessions at Schley County Senior Center in Ellaville, Georgia on January 8, 2020. 22 willing participants ages 67 to 89 were taught the basic Seated Tai Chi movements to help increase flexibility and muscle strength, better body posture and relief of aching joints.

The Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) is a one-stop resource for anyone who has questions about services for persons 60+ and persons with disabilities. Recently one of our ADRC Counselors worked with Mr. Malone to identify resources to help him live independently. Mr. Malone (64 years old) was referred to the ADRC by Adult Protective Services. They were as-signed him with Direct Services, a sub-contractor of the River Valley Regional Commission Area Agency on Aging, and Mr. Barfield helped him budget his income in order to pay for home delivered meals temporarily. Mr. Malone was also screened and was determined to be eligible to go on the waiting list for Homemaker and Home Delivered meals. He has since started receiving both services. He was also linked with Natalie Prater, ADRC Resource Specialist with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), to be assessed for service through DBHDD.

Through the collaboration of Adult Protect Services, the ADRC and DBHDD, Mr. Malone has found safe and stable housing, regular nutritious meals, assistance with maintaining the cleanliness of his home and hopefully on-going services to help him continue to live independently for as long as possible.

Environmental Planner Collaborates with Upper Flint Regional Water Council to Push for Agricultural Innovation, Trellis Systems
Qwentavian Tyson came to the WIOA funded program at Eckerd Connects to obtain his General Education Diploma. He spent many hours with Eckerd staff studying, practicing, and being a role model for his fellow GED classmates. In two short months, Qwentavian’s persistence paid off as he achieved his educational goal and achieved his GED. After obtaining his GED, Qwentavian was placed in the Work Experience services to gain hands-on work experience. Qwentavian was placed at the Americus Housing Authority working in the maintenance department where he gained some valuable workplace fundamentals and skills. He is currently enrolled at South Georgia Technical College studying Computer Science.