

# ACTION

## From the Editor

### Rural Alabama Initiative Success Stories

The Rural Alabama Initiative (RAI) grant program was created in 2007 by The Alabama Cooperative Extension System. The program is administered by the Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI) to provide seed money for worthwhile community initiatives. In 2007, 48 grants of between \$1,000 and \$25,000 were awarded to fund worthy local projects in communities throughout Alabama. This program funds educational initiatives related to community and economic development.

"Action" is a quarterly publication of ECDI, Extension, 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 plays a leading role in revitalizing Alabama communities, especially in the state's rural areas. ECDI works to strengthen community capacity to engage local challenges, take advantage of opportunities and build on available assets. "Action" is a tool that allows us to link AU and Extension resources to community groups, which represents direct funding relationships between ECDI and many Alabama communities.

**Rural Alabama Initiative success stories** are the focus of this spring 2008 issue of "Action." Mike Easterwood, project management specialist with ECDI, is the coordinator for this segment of the newsletter. Arturo Menefee, community leadership specialist with ECDI is responsible for the "What's Happening in Alabama?" segment of this newsletter.

The next issue of "Action," summer 2008, will highlight **Alabama's Scenic Byways program**. For more information on these topics or to suggest additional topics, contact the editor by phone (334) 844-3517, fax (334) 844-4709, or e-mail chesnjt@auburn.edu.

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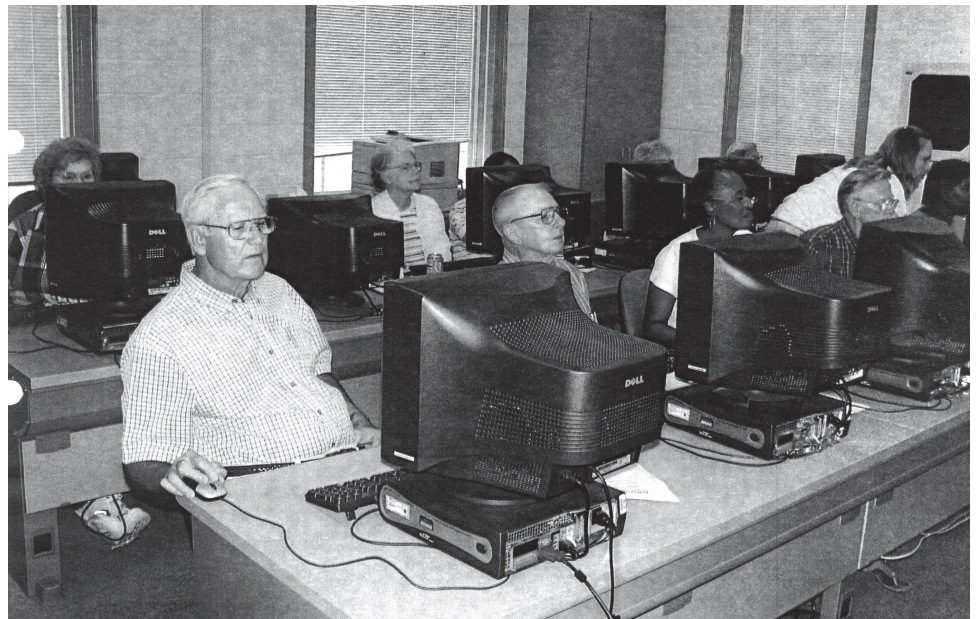
## Rural Alabama Initiative Success Stories

ECDI funded 48 Rural Alabama Initiative projects in 2007 for a total of about \$500,000. The 2007 RAI grant application process was competitive, with 119 applications submitted. The 48 RAI projects addressed a range of community and economic development issues throughout Alabama, with a special focus on youth and adult leadership development, workforce development and small town economic development. As the 2007 projects near completion, eight RAI projects merit highlighting as examples of successful initiatives. These projects are summarized below.

### Black Belt Mayors Leadership Initiative

This RAI project provided leadership training for mayors and other elected officials, as well as community and business leaders and youth in five Black Belt counties: Choctaw, Greene, Hale, Marengo and Sumter. Over the course of the project, approximately 60 individuals took part in the leadership development training sessions that were held in each of the participating counties. Utilizing the RAI grant, 10 members of the leadership class attended the 2007 session of Your Town Alabama, one of the best known and most effective small community development training programs in the state. The Your Town Alabama session provided Black Belt leaders an intensive learning experience in how to develop

(Continued on page 2)





successful strategies to solve small town problems related to community design. One attendee, Mayor Eddie Woods of Forkland, noted, "This experience has motivated me to be a more aggressive and positive leader in my community." Finally, four mayors and one chamber of commerce director attended Week 1 of the Intensive Economic Development Training Course administered by ECDI. This training program, held at the Auburn University Hotel and Conference Center, provided sessions on a range of community and economic development topics, with an emphasis on Alabama issues and opportunities.

### **Henry County Workforce Academy**

Henry County, through the leadership of Renaissance Headland, used the RAI grant program to develop an economic and educational collaborative to create and implement a workforce and leadership academy for the county. The Henry County Workforce Academy project

targeted students in grades 8 through 12, unemployed and underemployed workers, and current and future county leaders. Project goals included reducing the school dropout rate, upgrading worker skills and preparing county leaders to better respond to rapidly changing economic circumstances. Project leaders were able to establish two workforce development facilities, one in Headland and one in Abbeville. These facilities serve as focal points for the county's major workforce development activities. Classes conducted at the two locations focus on assisting unemployed or underemployed workers, as well as school students, with a special emphasis on student retention. RAI project leaders played critical roles in the creation of the Henry County Workforce Strategic Plan, which was completed in 2007 with assistance from Ed Castile with the Alabama Industrial Development Training department. RAI project leaders worked closely with high school officials in Abbeville and Headland to begin implementation of the strategic plan at both schools.

### **Enhancement of Computer Usage for Rural Escambia County Residents**

This project was designed to generate awareness for the need for learning to communicate electronically and to provide specific training for rural Escambia County residents who wish to improve their computer skills. Approximately 20 county residents attended the computer class sessions conducted at Jefferson Davis Community College campuses in Atmore and Brewton. Class participants learned the basics of computer technology and how computers can help them in their personal lives and in business activities. Training sessions were devoted to such topics as using e-mail, online banking and online tax filing. Special emphasis was placed on utilizing the Internet as a valuable tool in both personal and business functions.

## Leaders for Pike Road

This project was devoted to training approximately 40 Pike Road residents (youth and adults) in a range of topics including leadership skills, citizen engagement, stakeholder connections and networking, tourism and retiree attraction, entrepreneurship and small business development, community events and festivals, natural resource utilization and sustainable development. The overall goal of the Leaders project was to prepare a cross-section of residents to become future community leaders. As a relatively new municipality (the town was incorporated in 1998), Pike Road wanted to ensure that the community would be successful as it grows into the future. The RAI project provided support for the community to carry out a successful training and education project that will help to place Pike Road in an optimal position as the community develops.

## Leadership Greene County

Leadership Greene County focused on educating emerging and current leaders in the county and preparing these individuals for greater civic involvement and responsibilities. The project featured monthly leadership development sessions and involved 15 Greene County residents. Class participants received formal presentations in the basics of

leadership and leadership skills, as well as sessions devoted to learning more about the county economy, local and state government, and strategies for developing successful communities.

## Leadership Selma-Dallas County

This RAI project focused on developing a cross-section of youth and adults in Dallas County into effective leaders. Both groups not only participated in formal leadership development sessions but also completed several community projects that provided opportunities for participants to apply their new leadership skills. Youth participants also traveled to Columbiana to attend leadership sessions at the Alabama 4-H Center. In addition to acquiring new leadership skills, youth participants received training in respect and cooperation, understanding differences and tolerance. After completing the formal training portion of the project, youth and adult participants carried out community assistance projects that provided hygiene items for residents of the Cahaba Center for Mental Health and Mental Retardation. Other community assistance projects carried out by the leadership class members included assisting in the delivery of toys for children at the Children's Home, assisting the Department of Human Resources and American Red Cross in a blanket drive and donating approximately \$300 worth of canned goods to a senior citizen program. The 2007 RAI-supported leadership class was the 10th such class for Leadership Selma-Dallas County.

## Pine City Ambassadors: Jackson County's Youth Development Program

This 9-month RAI project was sponsored by the Jackson Area Chamber of Commerce and focused on developing youth leaders from high school seniors attending Jackson High School, Jackson Academy and Leroy High School. After being selected to participate in the project, students attended an orientation session and a beginning leadership retreat to kick off their activities. Initial sessions focused on developing team-building skills and discussing various leadership styles and the importance of mutual respect in all activities. Additional

class sessions covered community and economic development strategies, business retention and expansion, citizen engagement, community networking, and community events and festivals.

## Technology Camp for High School Counselors

The Technology Camp project provided high school counselors from east Alabama with a week-long training course designed to teach participants about technical education programs, skills needed for successful completion of technology programs and job opportunities in technology fields. Southern Union State Community College in Opelika carried out this successful RAI project. High school counselors from 13 east Alabama schools attended the Technology Camp in June of 2007. Each attendee spent 3 hours in each of the eight technical program areas at the Opelika campus: Automotive Collision Repair, Automotive Mechanics, Engineering Graphics and Design, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration, Electricity/Electronics/Industrial Maintenance, Machine Shop and Welding. Participating counselors joined current students to gain hands-on experience in each technical topic. Instructors provided brief lectures on the basics of the subject area and discussed the necessary high school preparation skills as well as employment opportunities for students completing the various courses. At the conclusion of the Technology Camp, attending counselors had an opportunity to hear from area business and industry officials concerning their technical employee needs. All participating counselors praised the Technology Camp, indicating that they had gained new insights into what technical education is all about and how they can play a vital role in preparing their students for technical job opportunities.

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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.

# What's Happening in Alabama?

## Marengo County Economic Development Authority Established

In the rapidly changing world of economic development, countywide cooperation is imperative. Until a county establishes one voice for economic development, it cannot join in the regional efforts that are necessary for success. In January 2007, two Marengo County commissioners, the mayors of the eight municipalities in the county, representatives of two local industrial development boards and County Extension Coordinator Kathryn Friday were invited to a meeting to discuss the possibility of forming a countywide economic development authority. At that meeting, a steering committee was appointed, composed of 30 county citizens. Commissioner Ken Tucker and

CEC Kathryn Friday were asked to serve as cochairpersons of the group.

In March, the group received funding from the RAI grant program, which, in turn, provided money for training the steering committee. Joe Summers, of ECDI, provided some of this training, as did economic developers from other sections of Alabama such as Larry Lee of Opelika and Grady Batchelor of Winston County. The Marengo County office of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System served as the point of contact for all committee members and handled all communications for the group.

The steering committee established an organizational structure for a Board of Directors, developed a mission statement for the authority, and produced bylaws. Once the bylaws were approved by the county attorney, Tucker and Friday visited each city council member in the county and asked them to approve the bylaws, appoint members to the Board of Directors and commit funding to the Marengo County Economic Development Authority (MCEDA). Tucker and Friday also addressed any concerns the council members had about the bylaws

or structure of the board. By the end of December, every city or town in the county committed funding, as did the County Commission. With funding in place, a Board of Directors was appointed and met in January to formally organize and to hire an economic developer. This is just another example of how Extension, working with local groups, can help our rural areas develop.

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Visit the Community Resource Development home page at [www.aces.edu/departments/crd/](http://www.aces.edu/departments/crd/)

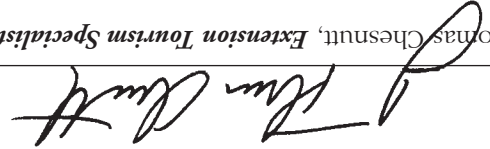
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