

# ACTION

## From the Editor

### Scenic Byways Program

Travel and tourism is a significant and growing economic engine for Alabama. In 2007, travelers spent more than \$9.3 billion in the state, an increase of 10 percent from 2006. More than \$685 million of state and local tax revenues came from travel and tourism activities. While the focus is often on larger communities, smaller communities can benefit from tourism as well if they focus on resources that already exist — their cultural, historical and natural resources. The development and promotion of **scenic byways** is one method of doing this.

The Economic and Community Development Institute, a partnership of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and Auburn University, publishes "Action" once each quarter. ECDI's vision is to become the state's preeminent change agent for positive economic and community development policy and practice. ECDI attempts to serve Alabama communities, especially small- and medium-sized rural and economically distressed areas, and to maintain effective connections and communication among the many diverse economic development actors in Alabama. "Action" is one of the methods we use to accomplish these goals.

The **Alabama Scenic Byways Program** is the focus of this issue of "Action." J. Thomas Chesnutt, Extension tourism specialist with ECDI, is the coordinator for this segment of the newsletter and Joe Watts, byways project coordinator, Alabama Association of Regional Councils, is the author of the next segment. The author for the other two segments of this newsletter is Arturo S. Menefee, leadership development specialist with ECDI.

The next issue of "Action," fall 2008, will highlight **Extension's Farm-City Program**. For more information on these topics or suggestions for additional topics, contact the editor at (334) 844-3517, fax (334) 844-4709, or e-mail chesnjt@auburn.edu.

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



Appalachian highlands, Piedmont

## Alabama Scenic Byways Program

*"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference."*

Robert Frost

The roads less traveled in Alabama are often our most beautiful. Everyone uses roads — they're the backbone of our transportation system, and without them not much could get done. They're how we get to work and how groceries get to market. But they also are so much more. Roads are how the world sees us. Roads are how impressions are made. Mostly, we see the world through our windshield.

Consider the old-fashioned Sunday drive. No one got into the car after lunch on Sunday expecting to go anywhere — it wasn't the destination that mattered, just that the wheels rolled and the scenery went by.

It is the idea of a Sunday afternoon drive that is the foundation of any pleasurable drive. One of America's most well-known scenic drives is the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina. The road is the destination. More than 10 million visitors drive some part of this 430-mile parkway every year, stopping to purchase gas, food, crafts, lodging and services along the way.

Alabama needs scenic byways for many reasons. One of the most important is financial. Increased business, tax revenue and jobs from tourism dollars along with the potential for additional federal and state funding for highway and roadside improvements are all possibilities with a successful program. A byway in your community does not require the same financial investment that building an industrial park requires. With a byway, a community must simply take pride in themselves and showcase to the traveler what is special about their road. The biggest investment comes in the form of community buy-in and personal pride.

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Talladega

That brings up the single most important part of the byways program. This truly is a grass roots program. Byways are conceived, shaped and managed by the community or communities through which they pass. The state program exists to help local communities work their way through the process of creating a byway and to make certain that any corridors live up to the expectations of the traveling public.

Preserving the qualities that make a roadway special is at least as important as recognizing them to begin with — without them the road isn't special anymore. That's why each byway is required to develop a corridor management plan. A management plan is basically a road map to the future of the byway. It helps explain the types of growth expected, the way the roadway will be promoted, things along the roadway that are particularly valuable and what is not important. The choice to have a byway begins and ends with people along the route.

The goal of the state program is to help people passionate about their roadways better protect the qualities they treasure. If pasture land and catfish ponds are what make the roadway a special place, then those are important aspects to consider when changes, such as new development, occur.

The state program follows the successful national program in recognizing the qualities that make a roadway a scenic byway: They must have scenic, historical, cultural, archeological, natural, or recreational significance to fit into the state program.

A road that does not have the vistas of distant mountains or roaring waterfalls can be a byway if it has other important features. Perhaps the best example of a national byway that does not fit the traditional mold is right here in Alabama — the Selma to Montgomery National Scenic Byway. It is not a particularly scenic road. No mountains are along the route. Nor does it have numerous wetlands, but it does have a history that makes it one of the most important roads in America.

The Scenic Byways Program is designed to help focus attention on some of Alabama's roadways, help promote those roads that may become scenic byways and provide rural Alabama with another economic development tool. Designation as a scenic byway provides a starting point for recognizing and protecting the beauty of our working lands (lands that are also used for catfish ponds, farming, timber production, and commercial development among other uses). The three basic phases to establish a scenic byway are eligibility, designation and implementation.

The first phase, eligibility, involves developing a narrative that explains the significance of the route in an educational and interesting manner (a corridor story), inventorying the significant resources located along the roadway and confirming that these resources fit the

criteria of the state program. The second phase involves designating the corridor as a byway and developing a corridor management plan. Finally, and most importantly, phase three involves actually implementing the recommendations found in the corridor management plan. This includes producing marketing materials, adding or enhancing visitor facilities such as pull-offs or rest areas and working with community partners to create a long-term plan for the road.

Byways are a way to create community ownership for Alabama's treasured landscapes and to protect the natural beauty and the distinctive character that makes Alabama more than just the place we live.

To learn more about the Alabama Byways Program, visit [www.alabamabyways.org](http://www.alabamabyways.org). And be sure to get out and enjoy the road!

**Joe Watts**

**Byways Project Coordinator**

**Alabama Association of Regional Councils**

## Resource Tools

### To Meet or Not To Meet

Millions of meetings are held in the United States each day. On any given day, a wide range of meetings likely is occurring: departmental, staff and committee meetings; meetings called for a special purpose; and meetings of a task force or group working on a specific project or program. Individuals are always busy with many competing demands on their time.

Because meetings always require time, energy and resources, individuals should ask the important question, "Why have a meeting?" Some suggest that man is a social species and it is natural within the human culture for people to come together in groups from time to time. Others profess the dominant theory that states meetings are the way much of the important work of any institution is accomplished. Therefore, there must be a specific purpose to hold a meeting. The major reasons for having a meeting are the following:

**Information Sharing and Education.** A well-run meeting can be an efficient method to share information on new policies or to educate individuals



Governor's Trail, Clio

on a new program or tool. Also, meetings offer opportunities for people to share their ideas and perspectives with others. Various view points and varying levels of experience creates a more in-depth discussion and individuals can learn from one another. For example, at a university, long-time faculty members can be invaluable to newer members of a department. Likewise, the ideas of younger staff can help older members of a department to look at old issues in a new way.

**Issue Identification.** Identifying issues is a key reason for holding a meeting. The diversity and knowledge of the group will help to establish a clear picture of the issue or problem. The different perspectives of the group will also increase the chances of developing solutions to resolve the issue or problem.

**Planning.** A common reason to hold a meeting is to plan something, such as a conference or project. Members work together to identify what needs to be done (goals), establish a timetable and assign tasks to accomplish the objectives. Planning meetings are most successful when everyone involved has a vested interest in the outcome.

**Decision-Making.** Meetings are opportunities for people to make decisions about issues that affect themselves and others. The diversity of vantage points, knowledge, expertise and

experience can help the group make better decisions than an individual might make alone. Also, participation in the decision-making process itself can be crucial if people are to understand, accept and support the decision that is made.

**Implementation and Evaluation.** Individuals in a group normally meet to conduct business on behalf of an organization. For example, according to the bylaws of nonprofit organizations, board members must meet a specific number of times per year. Also, individuals meet to evaluate the success of a program or the organization itself.

Meetings can be effective in the operation of an organization or a community initiative, but many of them fall short of expectations, producing only frustration, anger or lost time. Meetings are held for many reasons, but face-to-face meetings are not always necessary. First, when the primary purpose of having a meeting is to distribute information, consider whether a meeting is really needed. The key question is: "Will people need to voice concerns or make suggestions after they receive the information?" If not, a meeting is probably not needed. Second, if key people cannot be available at the time of the meeting, a meeting is not necessary. For example, if one is holding a meeting on economic development but most of the economic development experts are unable to participate in the meeting, then this meeting is not needed. The individual or host agency should reschedule. Third, people dislike being asked to attend a meeting to make a decision that has already been made. If the decision has been made, hold a meeting only if one sincerely wants feedback or if it is important to explain the reasons for the decision. Otherwise, it is more efficient to simply send an e-mail to members. Finally, unless a crucial issue requires immediate attention, one should avoid holding meetings at times when people are likely to be concerned with or overwhelmed by other priorities. For instance, one should try not to hold a meeting on the day before a holiday or when other major conferences or meetings are planned.

A great deal of the business of institutions, organizations and various groups is conducted at meetings. Meetings are necessary for the execution of policies and strategies of an organization or

business. A successful meeting is one that is necessary and in which specific objectives are accomplished as efficiently as possible. An unsuccessful meeting, on the other hand, can result in poorly made decisions, unfinished business and bad feelings. So, for the next meeting, please make sure that it is necessary.

**Arturo S. Menefee**  
Assistant Editor  
Extension Leadership  
Development Specialist, ECDI

## What's Happening in Alabama

### Alabama Community Leadership Network

The Alabama Community Leadership Network (ACLN) met on Tuesday, March 11, 2008, at the Alabama Power Watercourse Conference Center in Clanton, Ala., with 45 individuals representing more than 30 counties throughout the state of Alabama. The organizations represented at this meeting included individuals from various community leadership programs, chambers of commerce, universities, state community and economic development agencies, nonprofit organizations and private entities. The ACLN is a network of organizations and individuals who are committed to building, supporting, and enhancing community leadership.

The majority of the meeting focused on roundtable discussion. Participants were divided into eight groups (five to six individuals per group) and were asked to respond to the following questions: (1) What are the needs of your city/county in the area of community leadership programming? (2) What are the most pressing issues in your community?

The common responses from the groups regarding the first question are the following:

**Program Management and Assistance.** Basic materials are needed to assist communities, such as tools for outcome assessment and benchmarking, start-up outlines, leadership training curricula, sample programs and agendas, evaluation instruments, and a listing of mentors, speakers, and other resources.

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## ACTION

Alabama  
Communities  
in Transition

### Editor

J. Thomas Chesnutt  
*Extension Tourism Specialist*

### Assistant Editor

Arturo Menefee  
*Leadership Development Specialist*



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.

**Community Impact.** Individuals need assistance in identifying community needs and assets. Leadership goals and projects need to be implemented statewide, as well as public relations campaigns to highlight the importance of community leadership.

**Funding.** Agencies are in need of funding sources and grant support via grant-writing educational workshops.

**Communication/Networking.** To communicate and network effectively, regional meetings and trainings are needed to educate community participants and to foster collaboration. At these meetings, best practices and idea sharing can occur.

**Youth.** Organizations are in search of training materials for youth leadership programs and ways to get the youth more active in the local community.

The common responses from the groups regarding the second question are the following:

**Training.** Training is needed for elected leaders that should focus on financial accountability and ethical leadership.

**Community Interest and Involvement.** Interest in leadership programs is lacking. It is also difficult to secure volunteers for community initiatives, which yield a lack of cooperation among community members.

**Community Awareness.** Individuals are unaware of significant resources (individuals, organizations, programs, etc.) in the community and are also unaware of local problems and issues.

**Diversity.** Diversity is needed in leadership roles throughout the community. The local leadership pool needs to be expanded.

**Education.** Educational opportunities are lacking. More needs to be done in the areas of health care and workforce development as well.

This meeting provided meaningful insight into many concerns of communities and leadership programs in Alabama. The ACLN is committed to providing resources, training and networking opportunities to assist communities with resolving or alleviating local

concerns. The ACLN, in conjunction with Leadership Lee County, will hold its second annual conference in October 2008 at Auburn University. The ACLN is administered by the Economic and Community Development Institute at Auburn University. For more information on the ACLN or upcoming events, contact Arturo S. Menefee at (334) 844-2307 or e-mail [menefas@auburn.edu](mailto:menefas@auburn.edu).

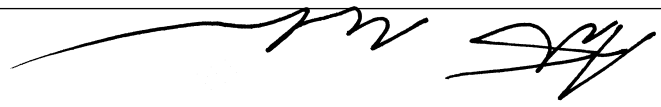
**Arturo S. Menefee**  
Assistant Editor  
Extension Leadership  
Development Specialist, ECDI

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

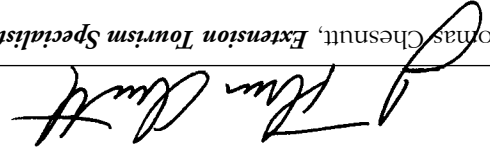
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Arturo S. Menefee, *Leadership Development Specialist*



J. Thomas Chesnut, *Extension Tourism Specialist*



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