

BBAC

Black Belt Action Commission

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ALABAMA'S Black Belt Action Commission

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COMMISSION HONORS GOV. RILEY AT CEREMONY

Members of Alabama's Black Belt Action Commission honored Gov. Bob Riley on Monday, August 23 for his efforts to improve living conditions for residents in the state's Black Belt region and surrounding areas.

Riley was honored at a luncheon held in observance of the commission's sixth anniversary in the Dunn-Oliver Acadome on the campus of Alabama State University in Montgomery.

Riley established the Black Belt Action Commission in August 2004. The mission of the all-volunteer organization is to improve health care, education, employment opportunities and overall quality of life in the 12-county region.

"Gov. Riley created the commission because he understood that Alabama's overall progress requires that the benefits of development be extended to every region, including the Black Belt," said Doni Ingram, Director of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs and Executive Director of the Black Belt Action Commission. "The Governor's concern, dedication and focus on the Black Belt has laid a strong foundation upon which the region can build a brighter future."

Committee chairs and other Black Belt Action Commission members were also honored for their contributions to the improvement of the region.

Gov. Bob Riley more than hinted that he hopes the Black Belt Action Commission continues to exist even after he leaves office in January. "I won't be here, but I hope the next administration understands what you have done," Riley said.

While the occasion was used to mark successes that volunteers have made in the 12-county region, it was also intended to honor Riley for his commitment to the program and the area.

Riley said the problems of the Black Belt haven't been solved "by a long shot," but the area still has progressed since the formation of the commission which is headed by ADECA Director Doni Ingram. Doni said seeing Riley's enthusiasm and commitment for improving the area made it hard not to want to be a part of the solution. Riley, meanwhile, said credit belongs to the volunteers. "I hope you take a tremendous amount of pride in what you have done," Riley said. "I want to thank you for proving to the Black Belt area what you are capable of. You developed something out of nothing. Six years later the Black Belt and Alabama are better for it."

State Sen. Hank Sanders, who serves as co-chairman of the commission, said a number of factors have come into play to make the commission's work a success. Absent from the success formulas has been money, which Sanders attributed as a positive.

"I have seen time after time that when there is a pot full of money folks fight about it. When the money is gone, they're gone (and) people devise solutions based on the amount of money involved," he said. "(On the Black Belt Action Commission) we devise the solution and then try to go find the money."

ADECA has played a large role in the Black Belt Action Commission. Emily Law has served as coordinator of the commission for four years and Bea Forniss chairs the Infrastructure Committee, one of 13 committees on the commission.





Governor Riley was presented with a quilt made by the quilters of Gee's Bend in Wilcox County as a remembrance of the Commission by Doni Ingram, Executive Director of the Commission. Tyson Howard, South Central Alabama Development Commission and John Clyde Riggs, Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Council assist with quilt.

DR. TONEA STEWART OFFERS FITTING TRIBUTE



Dr. Tonea Stewart gave a fitting tribute to Governor Bob Riley at the Black Belt Action Commission's Sixth Anniversary Celebration Luncheon. She began the tribute with the African call from the Lion King. Stewart stated, "The King called out to his people, but more importantly the people called out to the King and he appeared and answered the call." "Here we are six years later recalling the great things that have been accomplished because Governor Riley responded to the call of the Black Belt Region and its people.

Dr. Stewart thanked Governor Riley for answering the call of Alabama State University students from all over the country when it had been ignored by everyone. She said it would become a part of history, but that it was "his story."

She thanked Governor Riley for answering the call to the BP oil spill and hurricane Katrina for the citizens of Alabama's Gulf coast, Mississippi and Louisiana and said it would become a part

of history, but that it was "his story."

Dr. Stewart said we had come full circle and just as in the Lion King, thanked Governor Riley for standing up and speaking to the people and answering the call. She quoted from Margaret Walker's poem, "We are a people who do not throw their geniuses aside. It is our duty as artists and as witnesses for the future, if necessary to collect them one by one."

Dr. Tonea Stewart is an [American actress](#) and [University Professor](#) best known for her role as Aunt Etta on the television series [In the Heat of the Night](#). She has appeared in numerous TV shows and movies and is Director of [Theatre Arts](#) at [Alabama State University](#).

*** Additional information about the BBAC Sixth Anniversary Event and the audio of Dr. Stewart's tribute can be found at BlackBeltActionCommission.gov**

BLACK BELT ACTION COMMISSION ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Some of the accomplishments of the Black Belt Action Commission, which honored its sixth anniversary this month and its last before Gov. Bob Riley leaves office, include:

- Economic development projects that created more than 3,800 jobs with a total capital investment of about \$985 million.
- Free vision screenings for 70,000 children and follow-up treatment that included free eyeglasses for 9,500, with more than 1,000 receiving free treatments that could save their eyesight.
- Abolishment of a 30-year-old public health regulation that prevented dialysis clinics in the state from operating unless they were located within 10 miles of a hospital. The commission continues its efforts to bring dialysis centers to the region.
- Creation of the Black Belt Nature and Heritage Trail Guide, which features more than 50 destinations to promote tourism in the Black Belt.
- Job training programs in each Black Belt county providing 400 hours of free training to job seekers and the establishment of the West Alabama-East Mississippi WIRED Initiative, which connects entrepreneurs to resources that support small business development and financing. More than 1,700 Black Belt residents received training in job readiness and entrepreneurial development programs.
- Establishment of the Individual Development Account initiative, which helps Black Belt families build the financial resources to purchase a house, start a business or continue their education. Through the initiative, more than \$400,000 is being directed at Black Belt families using a federal grant and local matching funds.
- Along with all of the other high schools in the state, all of those in the Black Belt are now offering web-based and videoconference distance learning classes.
- The creation of Black Belt Treasures, a nonprofit in Camden that showcases and promotes the arts of the Black Belt region. Since its opening in 2005, Black Belt Treasures has grown from representing 75 artists in the Black Belt to representing more than 350.
- Financial and technical support provided to more than 200 community groups for youth arts programs, community festivals and youth sports programs.
- Expanding the Kid One Transport system into the Black Belt, which provides free transportation to and from doctors' offices for pregnant women and children under 19.
- The 2-1-1 Connect program, a one-call service that offers access to programs that provide employment support, help for senior citizens and disabled, and volunteer opportunities.
- Bringing the On-Line Learning for Low- Wage Workers Program to the Black Belt. The program is a Rutgers University e-learning initiative that uses laptops and the Internet to increase the employment skills of adult learners.
- \$17.8 million in grants for water and sanitation improvements that were secured through commission members' work with government agencies and local leaders.
- Creation of the nonprofit Black Belt Superintendents Coalition, which gives public schools in the Black Belt the cooperative purchasing power utilized by larger school systems.
- Created a network of approximately 70 partnerships which were responsible for the accomplishment of numerous projects throughout the Black Belt.
- Technical assistance provided to help Black Belt counties establish their own economic development agencies.

Commission Comments



Senator Hank Sanders, Co-chair, Margaret Bentley, Co-Chair, Sheldon Day, Co-Chair

"We have been on a special journey for the past six years and we are still on the road to a better Black Belt region. The original vision and mission is still being pursued with passion and commitment. The Commission continues to have energy, commitment and productivity. We began with no money set aside for the Commission projects. Instead, each committee decided its course of action and secured its own resources. We have worked 'with' the people of the Black Belt and key partnerships were formed which brought resources to bear on the solutions. Much has been accomplished, but we know so much more awaits us."



John Zippert, Chair Agriculture Committee

"I have been a member of the Agriculture Committee since the beginning and I am now Chairperson of this committee. We have worked on several beneficial projects and we are presently working on the Black Belt Fruit and Vegetable Marketing and Innovation Center to be located on Highway 80 west of Selma. This will provide a center and series of services to assist family farmers in the Black Belt counties to increase their effectiveness and income through production and cooperative marketing of farm products. This is a complex project that has taken significant time, effort and resources from our members and the state but will pay significant benefits for people of the Black Belt and the state when it becomes operational."



Bea Forniss, Chair, Infrastructure Committee

"The Black Belt Action Commission has been instrumental in bringing together groups of committed community volunteers with one goal in mind; that is to assist the people in this economically-distressed region of the state to help themselves. The Infrastructure Committee has been and continues to be instrumental in community and infrastructure development. That committee has been responsible for channeling Community Development Block Grant funds to the area in order to enhance the growth of public infrastructure. The separate committees provide a voice and advocacy to state and federal officials. It is important that the Commission continues to lead and guide this portion of the state and discover ways to further enhance the goals and objectives that have been set by the people in the region."



John Clyde Riggs, Executive Director, Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission

"The Black Belt Action Commission (BBAC) has been one of the most incredible efforts involving volunteers I have seen in my 35 years with ATRC. When I look back at all the programs and projects that have benefited the people in the Black Belt through the BBAC's efforts and realize the millions of dollars in grant funds and foundation dollars that have been brought into the Black Belt, it proves once again that people care about people and given the opportunity they will rise above their own desires and needs to help those who are less fortunate. It would be a shame to not continue this volunteer driven effort that has helped so many."



Tyson Howard, Director, South Central Alabama Development Commission

"The Black Belt Action Commission has drawn attention to the Black Belt region and identified problems and has provided leadership and resources to address these issues. The BBAC has installed a pride of ownership in the region that has never existed resulting in the region advancing more than any other in the State of Alabama over the past six years."



Donald Mills, Chair, Small Business Committee

"Small Business is Everybody's Business" because of the important role small business provide in our national, state and local economies. Not only does small business impact our nation in a great way, it crosses all threads of the community. Small Business Development is directly linked to Economic Development which fuels Community Development. The Black Belt Action Commission has been a driving force in synergizing growth and development in the Black Belt area on all levels. This objective is being accomplished not by monetary contributions but by identify and capitalizing on the resources available.

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Shirley Worthington, Chair, Transportation Committee

"Over the past six years, the Black Belt Action Commission has addressed challenging issues with transportation at the top of the list. The BBAC Transportation Committee began a dialogue to improve mobility that resulted in three key strategies: (1) regional call centers where Alabama residents can get information on transit options and through which ALDOT can obtain actual data to plan public mobility routes; (2) a study to determine how Alabama can plan for inter-regional and inter-municipal mobility; and (3) the formation of the Alabama Transit Coalition that is a public/private partnership dedicated to pursuing best practice mobility strategies in Alabama. This work needs to continue if Alabama is going to effectively address cross-sector system issues."

BBAC Small Business Committee Hosts 2nd Annual Business Resource Fair

The 2nd Annual Small Business Summit was held Thursday, October 21, 2010 at the Selma Convention Center in conjunction with the BBAC Small Business Committee. The Resource Fair targeted Individuals in business, those looking to expand a business and those in need of financing for small business with concurrent workshops offered in legal structure, taxes, financing, business plans and success stories. The twelve speakers and vendors included the Alabama Department of Transportation, Alabama Tombigbee Regional commission, Regions Bank Alabama Cooperative Extension System, ADECA, Ala-Tom RC & D, Small Business Advocacy, and the Small Business Administration.

Sponsors of the event were Pioneer Electric Cooperative, Alabama Power Foundation, Artesian Utilities System Management, Alford & Associates LLC, First Cahawba Bank, Riverdale Credit Union, the City of Selma, and Pepsi. Ellwood Christian Academy, Dallas County High School- Beta Club, and Wallace Community College - Phi Theta Kappa sent volunteers to help with the event, which hosted a total of 100 participants.



Financing Panel from right to left Jamie Wallace - Economic Development Specialist Alabama Tombigbee Regional Commission, Greg Dansby - Coordinator Ala-Tom Resource Conservation & Development, Diane Roehrig - President ALACOM Finance, Gorver Brown - Loan Officer Community Enterprise Investments, Thomas Stokes - Community Affairs Officer Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Joe Watts - Chief Financial Officer Pioneer Electric Cooperative, Inc.



Mayor George Evans - City of Selma

Introducing the Black Belt to Broadband



MONTGOMERY, Alabama, May 27, 2010 – Governor Riley’s Connect-ing Alabama broadband initiative today announced invigorating progress for the advancement of broadband in Alabama. Governor Riley appointed Ms. Jessica Dent to lead the Connecting Alabama initiative. This is an important step for Alabama to determine our next step forward, said Jessica Dent.

Dent explains, Citizens will be able to visit the site, input a specific street address and in seconds know if they have broadband coverage available. The map will display if the address is served, underserved or unserved.

“Technology is advancing at such a rapid rate that if our communities do not demand the technology highway come to their community it will pass them by; as will the

advances in healthcare, public safety, education and economic development”, continued Dent. We must continue to identify and address the barriers to access and increase the demand for broadband—particularly in our rural areas. The maps can be viewed beginning tomorrow on the project’s website:

www.connectingalabama.gov

"BBAC Familes Committee Helps Put Stimulus Money To Work For Black Belt"

By EASON FRANKLIN
The Lowndes Signal

With the efforts of Governor Bob Riley’s Black Belt Action Commission, residents of Lowndes County have a new opportunity to improve their lives to become self-supporting. The Subsidized Employment Program (SEP) is a new program administered by the Department of Human Resources (DHR) in a conjunctive effort with the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and the Alabama Career System to provide paid employment to Family Assistance (FA) recipients.

Kimberly Means, who is employed within the Lowndes County Board of Education as a secretary with the Special Education Department, is a participant in this new program. As a single parent living in Hayneville, Means praised the SEP’s efforts and has been enrolled for over two months. It primarily assists in helping her care for her 19-month old daughter who she is “crazy about.” “I was brought into the program through the Career Readiness Program to assist in acquiring the skills to find a job,” said Means. “This is what I love to do.”

SEP offers an incentive to employers by reimbursing them 100-percent of an employee’s wage for six months through DHR.

People employed through the program receive the same pay, benefits and compensation as every other employee whom is offered the same type of work. The program is funded via stimulus funds provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and covers 80 percent of the cost of the SEP. Subsidy payments are available for all FA recipients in all 67 counties of Alabama including those with disabilities who participate in DHR’s Independence through Employment (ITE) program through DRS.

Currently seeking her General Education Diploma (GED) offered by Wallace Community College, the 25- year-old Means says she will continue to pursue her education which will allow her to secure a permanent status with the Board of Education.

Ginger Rue
BBAC Project Manager

BLACK BELT HEALTH UPDATE

By Laurie Stewart, Project Manager
BBAC Health Committee

With over 300 members from 38 partner organizations, the Black Belt Action Commission (BBAC) Health Committee has worked diligently since 2004 to improve quality and access to healthcare in Alabama's Black Belt counties. In an area where so many people were already living at or below the poverty level, the quality of life was lessened by little to no access to quality healthcare. The BBAC Health Committee immediately started looking at what was standing in the way of quality healthcare and how to reach it.

To date the BBAC Health Committee has worked to create the Black Belt Eye Care Consortium, reinstate state funding for the Rural Medical Scholarship Awards Program, and increase funding for rural health pipeline programs. The Health Committee is also responsible for the elimination of a 30 year old state regulation that prevented dialysis centers in rural areas of the state. The Health Committee continues to work closely with Fresenius Medical Group and the people of Perry County to open a dialysis center in Perry County. Other projects out of the BBAC Health Committee include youth soccer programs in rural counties, prostate cancer screenings, and dental initiatives.

The BBAC has brought the Governor's KidCheck Program to seven school systems throughout the Black Belt and looks forward to continuing to expend the program in coming school years. The Governor's KidCheck Program works to build collaborative partnerships to implement comprehensive school based health screenings in interested Alabama schools. The KidCheck staff and steering committee then assist in the coordination of necessary follow-up services. Through the KidCheck Program, we are able to identify children who are uninsured and provide their parents with joint public health insurance enrollment forms for Medicaid and ALL Kids. At the completion of the 2010-2011 school year, KidCheck will have provided over 10,000 free health screenings to children in the Black Belt who otherwise would not have received them.

Lowndes County Schools Receives \$14 million Grant



Dr. Boyd

The Lowndes County Board of Education was recently awarded a \$14 million 1003g grant, the largest award in the state. The Board prepared a proposal of over 200 pages, carefully detailing how the grant money would be used to improve its Tier I schools (Tier I schools are the lowest performing schools academically). The grant will allow Lowndes County to improve teaching and learning by implementing a reform initiative with education professionals from Samford University to build school leadership among existing faculty. The grant will also allow Lowndes County to continue its highly successful Helping Families Initiative—Making the Right Choices (MRC), a research-based program that the District Attorney's office, the Lowndes County school system and other community agencies provide for intervention and services to truant and other at risk children and their families. The program is designed to prevent truancy and disruptive student behavior from hardening into delinquency and criminality. Part of the program is for the District Attorney's staff to present information to classes and assemblies, conduct one on one intervention with students upon request by parents and teachers, and conduct community outreach to inform the public of the correlation between disruptive behavior at school and subsequent juvenile crime.

Dr. Daniel Boyd, Superintendent of Lowndes County Schools and Chairman of the Black Belt Action Commission's Education Committee, is excited about the opportunities the grant will afford the schools. "This comprehensive reform initiative will definitely improve teaching and learning," Boyd says. "This implementation will impact our schools for decades due to the integration of technology and the change in teaching methodology. We are forever indebted to Tomi Selbly (CEO of ITS) who partnered with us to make this idea a reality."

BBAC Executive Committees

Agriculture Committee

John Zippert, Chairman

Communications Committee

Dr. David Hale, Chairman

Community Development Committee

Felecia Jones, Chairman

Cultural and Youth Committee

Carol Zippert, Chairman

Education Committee

Dr. Daniel Boyd, Chairman

Skills Training

Dr. James M. Mitchell, Chairman

Families Committee

Dr. Lynn Boyd, Chairman

Health Committee

Congressman Artur Davis, Chairman
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George Alford, Chairman

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Donald Mills, Chairman

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Shirley Worthington, Chairman

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