

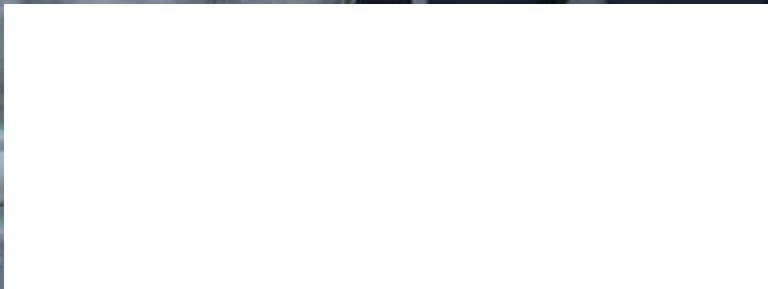
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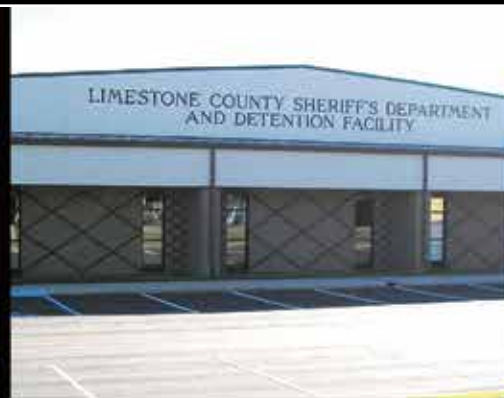
# COUNTY COMMISSION

Volume 60, Number 5  
September | October 2016

A man in a dark suit and tie stands in front of a building entrance. To his left are several potted plants in a large stone planter. The background shows a building with columns and windows.

2016-17 PRESIDENT  
**BILL  
STRICKLEND**





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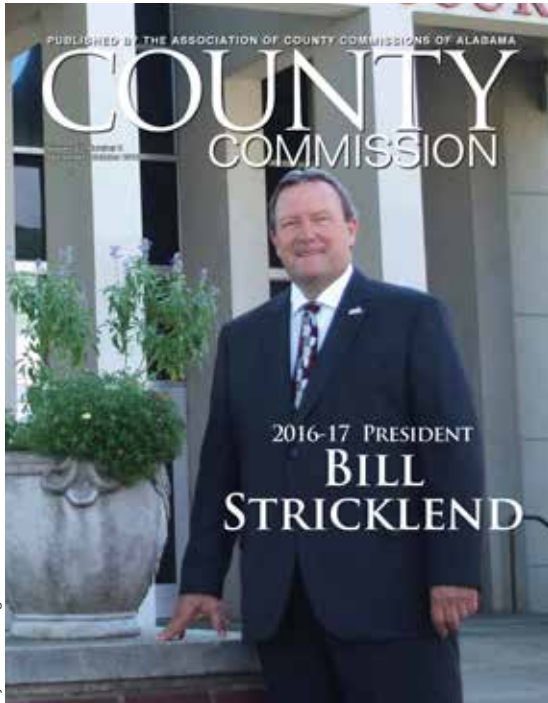
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# President's PERSPECTIVE



Hon. Bill Strickland  
President

**To move forward,  
we must stand  
shoulder to  
shoulder**

**Collectively solving  
our collective  
problems with  
collective solutions**

*Editor's Note: This is the prepared text of the inaugural address that Bill Strickland delivered at the 2016 ACCA Annual Convention.*

**O**ne of the things that continues to inspire me about our Association is its ability to bring together over 320 county commissioners, and thousands of county employees to “speak with ONE voice” despite the enormous differences that exist between each of our unique county governments.

While county commissions are only separated by an imaginary county line, more often than not, they are as different as night and day. My home county of Marshall is, unbelievably, bordered by seven other counties – Jackson, Madison, Morgan, Cullman, Blount, Etowah and DeKalb. And there are some stark differences between these counties and the commission on which I serve.

Five of these counties have countywide elected chairs – as we do – but one of those is a probate judge who has other duties outside the county commission. Our neighboring commissions vary in size from three commissioners to seven. About half the next-door counties operate their road departments on the district system, while the others utilize the unit system.

And I can keep going...

Some have personnel boards, others do not. Some have local laws authorizing the levying of some taxation, others don't. Some have a strong tax base that supports active and expansive county services, while others struggle to make payroll during the last couple of months of each fiscal year.

Everyone in this room could make a similar list that would illustrate the numerous distinctions between your home county and your neighbors.

To someone unfamiliar with the dynamics of the county family, these differences would make it virtually impossible for such a diverse group to pull in ONE direction. For how could these diverse governments, with varying powers and structures, possibly find a pathway toward unity of purpose and message?

Well, we ultimately work as a cohesive group because we know that for all of our differences, we could also list dozens of problems that we share. And, more importantly, we recognize that the many obstacles we face will only be solved if we live by one indisputable mission. And that mission is for us to stand – shoulder to shoulder – to collectively solve our collective problems with collective solutions.

Let me say that again, in order to move forward we must stand – shoulder to shoulder – to collectively solve our collective problems with collective solutions.

Over the years, this organization has excelled at just that. Times have changed in Alabama and, certainly, today times are very challenging inside every county courthouse and in our state's Capitol. But the Association has been steadfast and unmoving. And our membership has consistently stood in unity – despite our apparent differences.

Just during my short tenure in county government, I have seen this Association identify problems – sometimes problems so far beyond the horizon that others didn't share

our vision – and then pull us ALL together to avoid the rocks that would have surely sunk our goals.

In this way, our Association has served as an anchor for Alabama’s 67 counties in times of trouble. The anchor stabilizes the ship – and the people in it – from the raging waves, the roaring tide, and the various other distractions and disasters that may be thrown at it.

This Association, I believe, is just such an anchor for your county and for mine. It has grounded us, secured us, and provided safe harbor not only for us as elected officials – but for our employees, and for the citizens in our counties.

So tonight, before we leave this place and return to those challenging waters back home, it is time for us to drop a mental anchor, to become steadfast in our decision-making, and for us – as an organization – to declare “here is

where we stand” and “these are the rules we will use to move forward.”

Because if we are to overcome what is just over the horizon, we will have to lean on our Association, and each other, to remain secure in our collective mission.

Surely, if the Association is the anchor, then I believe our affiliate organizations and our amazing staff members who participate in those groups represent the chain that connects the “county government ship” to its anchor of safety.

Our Association has affiliate groups that serve county engineers, county administrators, 9-1-1 directors, emergency management directors and county revenue officers. And though they are not “officially” an affiliate, our Association continues to work very, very closely with the Alabama Jail Association.

Before we conclude tonight, I want to recognize and thank those

who deliver county services back home and who make this Association one of the strongest and most influential in the state. If you are a member of one of our affiliate groups, please stand. Everyone, please join me in thanking these professionals for all they do both back home and for this Association.

If you have read our new strategic plan, *Unifying the County Voice*, you know that we have set the “re-energizing” of our affiliate groups as one of our most important goals. The strength of this organization has, for many years, been the commitment and involvement of these affiliate groups. This year, we must take things to the next level.

Now, commissioners, I want to offer a challenge to you:

- Are you doing all you can to help us speak with ONE voice?

>>> *continued* PAGE 11

## CONGRATULATIONS to the Newly Elected Members of ACCA’s 2016-17 Legislative Committee

**DISTRICT 1** Hon. Bobby Everett | *Winston County*

**DISTRICT 2** Hon. Ben Harrison | *Limestone County*

**DISTRICT 3** Hon. David Kelley | *Marshall County*

**DISTRICT 4** Hon. Don Stisher | *Morgan County*

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**DISTRICT 6** Hon. Allen Caton | *Chilton County*

**DISTRICT 7** Hon. Laura Cobb | *Cleburne County*

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**DISTRICT 9** Hon. Ronda M. Walker | *Montgomery County*

**DISTRICT 10** Hon. Michael Armistead | *Choctaw County*

**DISTRICT 11** Hon. Doug Sinuefield | *Houston County*

**DISTRICT 12** Hon. Jerry Carl | *Mobile County*

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Association of County  
Commissions of Alabama







**Sonny Brasfield**  
Executive Director

*Sonny Brasfield*

**Do something  
different,  
even if it's wrong**

**Refocusing efforts  
to secure  
new revenue  
for county roads  
and bridges**

**M**ost everyone who knows me is aware that one of my passions is turkey hunting. When turkeys start gobbling in the spring time, most of my waking hours are either spent in the turkey woods, or in the Alabama State House pursuing the goals of Alabama's 67 counties.

So, it's no wonder that just the other day one of my favorite turkey hunting truisms rushed to the surface when the special legislative session came to a close. The words, which I whisper often during those spring mornings, just seem to capture the dilemma we face in trying to refocus and refine our odyssey to raise additional revenue for road and bridge projects in Alabama counties.

The special legislative session that ended just a few weeks ago was the fourth straight session in which a proposed gasoline and diesel fuel tax increase was introduced. And, unfortunately, it was the fourth straight session in which the measure failed to reach the floor of either chamber.

The legislation was first introduced during both of the 2015 special sessions, but it was never seriously considered for floor action. Then a compromise version of the legislation was introduced – albeit so late that it had very little chance of passage – in the 2016 regular session. Again, the bill never reached the floor.

And then on the second day of this year's special session, the compromise bill was re-introduced. This most recent effort fizzled quickly for a variety of reasons, including disagreements among other groups that sought to include additional provisions in

the legislation. Specifically, there are some who believe an increase in the tax of 6-cents per gallon is insufficient to really meet the massive infrastructure needs in Alabama. And that belief is correct.

However, it has been our experience that Alabama's Legislature is among the nation's most reluctant to endorse tax increases of any size and for any reason. As a result, we've tried to balance the real needs in light of the political reality. These differences of opinion have played a role, one must admit, in our inability to move the legislation during these last four sessions.

So, with the legislative term now half completed, those interested in more revenue have watched most of the sand trickle out of the hour glass, so to speak, without being focused or unified enough to get the measure to the floor. And that's just the truth.

This same kind of predicament often occurs when hunting turkeys in the spring time. There are mornings when the bird will gobble before daylight, giving you the chance to pick out a productive location for calling him within gun range. And on some mornings, once you sit down and start calling, he'll gobble with regularity and walk right up to your sitting spot just as planned.

But, honestly, that sequence of events almost never happens.

More often than not, the turkey just won't gobble very much and you find yourself sitting against a tree while the sand trickles out of the hour glass. Because I have things to do in Montgomery and the Legislature is usually in session, I really don't have the luxury of sitting there in the same spot just in case the turkey happens to walk by

my location sometime in the next six hours.

It's on those mornings – days when the remaining sand is trickling out of the hour glass – that I usually whisper out loud the words that I remembered just the other day. Those words go something like this: “Sonny, just sitting here is a complete waste of time. Do something else, even if it's wrong.”

You then gather up all your hunting gear; you rely on your experience and experiences; you pick a new course of action; and you confidently try something different. Sometimes the new approach works and the turkey shows up before you run out of hunting time. Sometimes it does not.

The alternative – continuing to make the same mistake over and over – almost never produces the

“  
*It is vitally important that a well-designed, workable and achievable piece of legislation be ready for introduction well before the Legislature returns to Montgomery in February.*”

desired result. It's just hard to see the logic in sitting there in the same spot when all evidence makes it clear that what you're doing isn't going to work.

And I've reached that place with our efforts to, one day, secure the revenue necessary to lessen our crumbling infrastructure problems.

It is time to do something different, even if it's wrong.

As an Association, we have until December or so to do decide how that “something different” should look. And we need to get busy working on our plans.

It is vitally important that a well-designed, workable and achievable piece of legislation be ready for introduction well before the Legislature returns to Montgomery in February. Our top priority must be reaching a consensus on the contents of that legislation – so that all organizations can pull in the same direction.

Sitting in the same spot and hoping that the solution will just wander by our hunting location is clearly not a good use of the few grains of sand remaining in the hour glass. ■



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**Morgan G. Arrington**  
Staff Attorney

*Morgan G. Arrington*

## Navigating new overtime rules by December 1

### No one-size-fits-all approach for counties

In the last few weeks, many of you have asked about the U.S. Department of Labor's new rules making changes to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) relating to overtime exemptions. The most significant change is an increase to the salary threshold for overtime pay eligibility. As the implementation date of Dec. 1, 2016, draws near, we want to discuss the impact of the changes to county government. Under the new rules, the salary threshold for overtime eligibility increases from \$23,660 to \$47,476 per year. To fully understand what this means, and to determine to which employees it applies, we need to go back a few steps.

#### **Who is Not Affected?**

Before we look at which employees are subject to the changes, let's rule out those persons who are NOT affected:

- Hourly workers
- Elected officials
- Executive, administrative, or professional workers who work 40 hours or less
- Salaried workers who do not primarily perform executive, administrative or professional duties
- "Highly compensated" workers (those making \$134,004 and satisfying a minimal duties test)

#### **Who is Affected?**

Under the FLSA, covered employees are categorized as "exempt" or "nonexempt." Only nonexempt employees are eligible for overtime pay. How do you determine which employee falls under which category? Some positions are classified as exempt by definition, so review the job description. Please note the difference between a job description and a job title – a job title alone is

insufficient to establish the status of an employee. If the job description is silent, then you need to apply a three-part test: 1) salary basis test, 2) salary level test, and 3) duties test.

**Salary Basis Test:** The basic question we are answering is whether the employee is an hourly worker or a salaried worker. Whether an employee is salaried depends on whether the employee has a "guaranteed minimum" amount of money he or she can count on receiving for any given work week. Said another way, is the employee's base pay computed from an annual figure divided by the number of paydays in a year? Even if this amount is expressed in hourly terms, if the employee can count on earning a guaranteed minimum, either through regular attendance and/or a combination of leave accruals, the employee most likely meets the salary basis test.

**Salary Level Test:** The salary level test is where the new rules apply. Today, a salaried county worker who makes more than \$455 per week/\$23,660 per year meets this test. Effective Dec. 1, this element will only be met if the salaried worker makes more than \$913 per week/\$47,476 per year. Moving forward, if an employee makes less than \$47,476, he or she is considered nonexempt and will be eligible for overtime pay. Does this mean that all salaried employees who make more than \$47,476 per year are exempt? No. There is one more part of the test to apply.

**Duties Test:** The duties test remains unchanged by the new rules; however, this element must be satisfied to be deemed exempt. An employee must perform executive, administrative or professional duties. The tests for these



categories are found in 29 C.F.R. § 541.100 et seq. and online at [www.alabamacounties.org/legallyspeaking](http://www.alabamacounties.org/legallyspeaking). It is very important for counties to review the tests and confirm that a salaried employee who makes more than \$47,476 per year is also performing the duties as described by law before the employee is deemed exempt.

In sum, to meet the executive exemption, the employee's primary duty must be the management of the county or a customarily recognized department, the employee must have direct supervision of two or more other employees, and the employee must have the authority to hire or fire (or this employee's recommendations on personnel actions must be given particular weight by the personnel board or county commission). The administrative exemption requires the employee's primary duty to be office work directly related to the management or general business

operations of the county,<sup>1</sup> including the exercise of discretion and independent judgment with respect to matters of significance. Finally, the professional exemption typically requires an advanced degree and the employee's primary duty must be work which is predominantly intellectual in character and requires the consistent exercise of discretion and judgment.

***How do Counties Adapt?***

To adapt to the new rules, one of the most obvious options is to raise the salaries of those employees who otherwise meet the salary basis and duties tests. However, that is not the only option. Counties may also pay overtime above a salary. For example, if an employee is salaried at \$33,000 and only occasionally works more than 40 hours per week, it may make more sense for the county to keep that salary at its current rate and pay the employee overtime wages on the few occasions it is earned.

Along these same lines, if neither paying overtime wages nor increasing the salary are practical options, the county can evaluate and realign employee workloads. Finally, as a governmental entity, counties may use compensatory time arrangements earned at the rate of 1.5 times for each overtime hour worked. If a county elects the compensatory time route, please be mindful that there is a required process to follow before implementing a comp time policy.

Every county will have to make some changes to current practice as it relates to overtime pay as of Dec. 1. As with anything in employment law, there is no one-size-fits-all approach; however, the basic constructs as outlined here should provide every county with the critical information needed to determine the specific impacts of this new rule. ■

<sup>1</sup>See 29 C.F.R. §541.201(b) on our website for more details

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- 24 Years**
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  - Hon. Lamar "Heedy" Hayes, Chilton County
  - Hon. Rhondel Rhone, Clarke County
  - Hon. Ray Goodson, Pike County
  - Hon. Gentry Lee, Russell County
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  - Hon. Kelvin Cunningham, Talladega County

**20 Years**

- Hon. Carl Johnson, Autauga County

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# President's PERSPECTIVE

>>>continued from PAGE 5

- Are you encouraging your professionals to be leaders in our affiliate groups?
- Are you demanding that they invest their time and energy?
- Are you investing the necessary county resources to ensure that your county is helping our Association – and your county – remain anchored in these troubling times? Are you?

Or are you complaining when your dedicated professionals want to spend a portion of their time to help anchor this Association so that it can make your county better?

If that's what you have been doing, I ask that you sharpen

your budget pencil, look at your professionals, and tell them "This is the year" they WILL become active members. Tell them that you expect them to bring what they learn back "home" to make your county better.

This issue is in your hands. I know you will do the right thing, because we have some extremely important challenges facing us in the year ahead. And we will have to work as a collective body to overcome them.

Let me quickly drop an anchor and outline the four goals I believe we must achieve, together, in the next 12 months.

First, (Past President Ray) Long and his vision have provided us with a pathway for educating the

public on the need for new road and bridge investments. Clearly the voters are very aware of the crisis that looms if we continue to wait for "a better time" to take action. But I believe that some in the Legislature are actually committed to doing nothing and that, in the face of this opposition, only the leadership of this organization can forge a pathway to address our massive needs.

We spent much of the morning talking about this issue. But I believe the time for talk is over. And that we must rally local leaders to demand new revenue is passed by the Alabama Legislature before we return here for the 2017 Convention.



*Immediate Past President Ray Long, President-Elect Steve McKinnon, 2016-17 ACCA President Bill Strickland, Vice President Tony Cherry and Minority Director Marcus Campbell*



This can only happen if we are committed and if we go back home and get to work – starting tomorrow!

Second, we have an opportunity to forge a new communication system for our 9-1-1 districts this year with the completion of the so-called ANGEN project, which links all our districts together into a common data system for processing emergency calls. This may require the passage of legislation and it may require a new investment of 9-1-1 revenue.

But we have some of the best 9-1-1 directors in the nation sitting in this room tonight. And I believe that, together, we can find the right path and that we will continue to be a national leader in 9-1-1 services. The solution will require your active support.

We also have three study commissions looking at:

1. The improvement of emergency management at the local level;
2. The reform of the counties' role in the expensive juvenile detention system;
3. And the long-overdue modernization of the Boards of Registrars system in every Alabama courthouse.

Our Third goal – success in each of these areas – will depend on the Association anchoring different opinions and perspectives into ONE Voice for county government.

And Fourth, we have two proposed constitutional amendments

that will be on the ballot this November that must be ratified by the voters.

One amendment will – FINALLY – provide counties with the ability to administer their own administrative affairs. This amendment DOES NOT provide any so-called Home Rule powers – like taxing or land regulation – but it will allow counties to deal with

in this state came together and established some rules. They bound the fate of county governments together through the creation of this Association. They dropped their anchor and pledged to work with their collective strength to achieve their collective goals.

In the weeks and months ahead, our Association will continue to honor their vision by speaking



**2016-17 ACCA President Bill Strickland (left) officially accepts the gavel from 2015-16 President Ray Long during the business session of the 88th Annual ACCA Convention.**

the basic issues that are necessary to operate efficiently in 2016.

The other proposed amendment will reduce the opportunities for “local” constitutional amendments to be forced to a statewide vote. This change will ensure that local voters make local decisions.

You will be asked to help spread the word on these important ballot initiatives and to use your influence to secure a “YES” vote on both these measures.

This is a full agenda, but one I know we can achieve.

Many years ago, county leaders

in ONE voice – with the goal of protecting, improving and promoting the collective needs of county government. And that will require every person in this room to commit to making the next 12 months a success for ALL 67 counties.

So before I leave this stage tonight, I give you my word that I have dropped my anchor. I have made a commitment. And I have resolved to collectively solve our collective problems with collective solutions.

I hope you will join me! ■



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**2015-16 ACCA President Ray Long (right) presents an Excellence in County Government Award to Mobile County. On hand to accept the award are (from left) Commissioners Merceria Ludgood, Connie Hudson and Jerry Carl.**



# Award-winning financial management

The Mobile County Commission was honored with one of ACCA’s 2016 Excellence in County Government Awards for a proactive financial management project to maximize the county’s capital improvement programs.

In a project called “Planning for the Future: The Time is Now,” the county commission instituted policies governing reserve funds and debt management. These policies were designed to measure the efficiency of the capital improvement programs and to ensure that stated program goals were met.

The county uses capital improvement programs as a funding mechanism for both small- and large-scale capital investments in infrastructure and facilities, whether existing or new.

“In all, Mobile County’s

performance has garnered it positive bond ratings with Standard & Poor’s Rating Services and Moody’s Credit Rating Agency,” the county wrote in the award application. “By implementing good practices, Mobile County has consistently performed and stabilized its financial outlook.”

The Excellence in County Government Award recognizes innovative and effective programs initiated or completed during the previous year and implemented by the commission itself and not its

agencies or boards. Mobile County won in the category for counties with populations greater than 50,000.

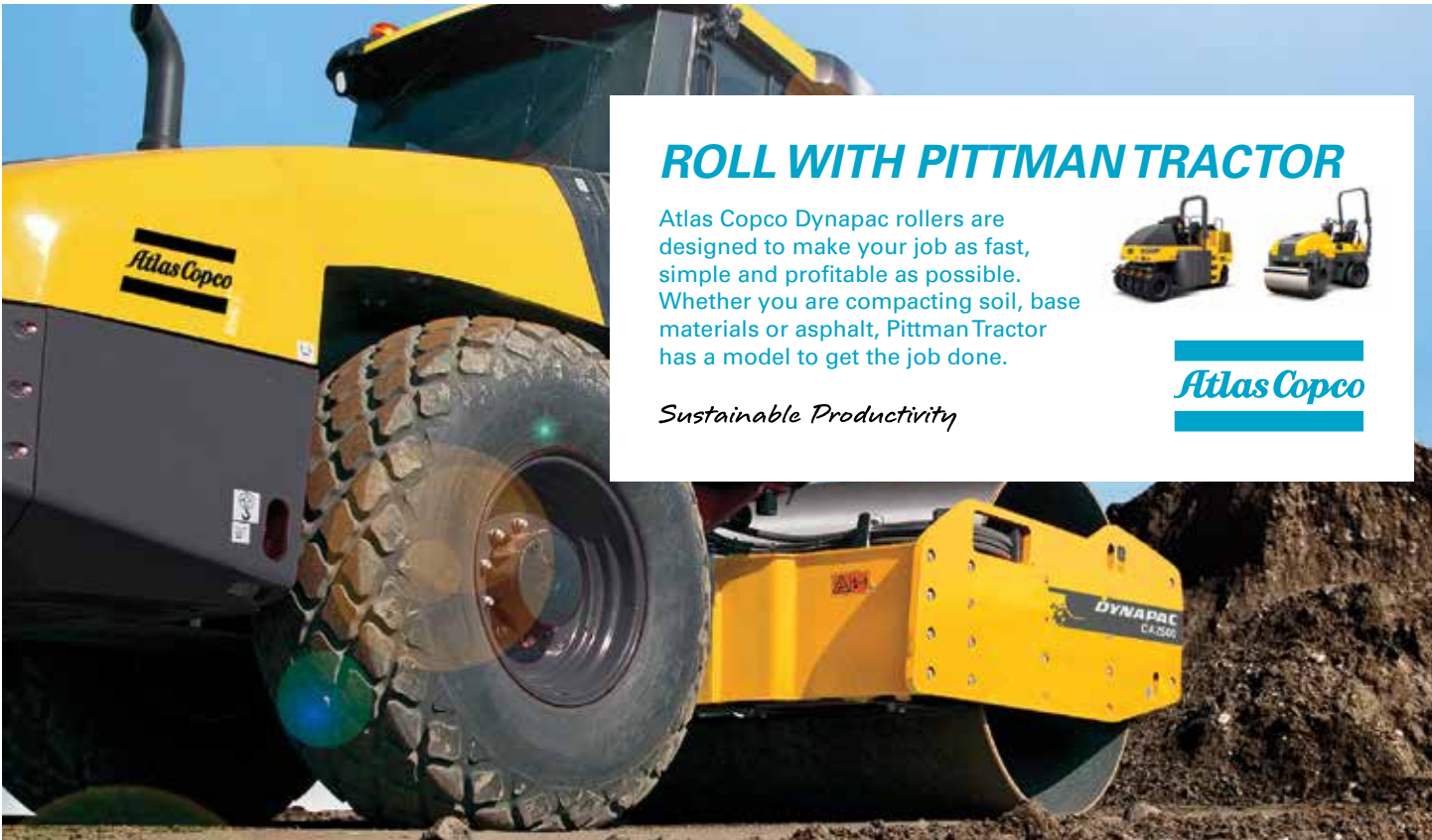
The county found that these two policies – on reserve funds and debt management – complemented each other to improve the county’s financial health.

The Fund Balance Policy specifies the size and composition of the county’s financial reserve and identifies certain requirements for replenishing any fund balance reserves utilized. This was intended to address a concern that, although bond rating agencies do not specify required levels of reserves, these levels may be taken into consideration when the county’s credit worthiness is evaluated.

Taken together, the provisions of the comprehensive Debt Management Policy are intended to ensure that debt management decisions are viewed positively by rating agencies, the investment community and the citizens of Mobile County. ■







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**2015-16 ACCA President Ray Long (left) presents the Excellence in Rural County Government Award to Pickens County. On hand to accept the award is Yolanda Smith, assistant county administrator.**

## Winning with workforce development

**C**onstruction begins this fall on a brand-new Pickens County College and Career Center, the result of the county's first-ever workforce development plan.

The successful outcomes from the three-year plan, spearheaded by the county commission, earned Pickens County one of ACCA's 2016 Excellence in County Government Awards.

The Excellence in County Government Award recognizes innovative and effective programs initiated or completed during the previous year and implemented by the commission itself and not its agencies or boards. Pickens County won in the category for counties with populations less than 50,000.

"There are things we can do as elected officials," said Pickens County

Commissioner Frederick Kennedy, who initiated the collaborative efforts that led to formation of the Pickens County Workforce and Economic Development Partnership. "If (commissioners) want to work and we want to see growth and want to see things happen in our communities, we've got to get together and work together," Kennedy said.

Like most rural areas, economic development is a top priority – and

top challenge – in Pickens County. Kennedy started with a focus on recruiting new jobs to the area, but he found that local employers were having trouble filling existing jobs and that new businesses would be unlikely to locate there without qualified people ready to work.

Stakeholders convened in partnership and identified specific strategies and initiatives to undertake in the next three years. For each initiative, key players and stakeholders were identified to take the lead.

The partnership brought together representatives of the county commission, AIDT (state workforce development agency), Pickens County public schools, the two-year college system, chambers of commerce, the family resource center, the Aliceville federal prison (one

***Pickens County  
Excellence in Rural  
County Government  
2016  
Association of County  
Commissions of Alabama***



“There are things we can do as elected officials. If (commissioners) want to work and we want to see growth and want to see things happen in our communities, we’ve got to get together and work together,” said Pickens County Commissioner Frederick Kennedy.

of the county’s big employers), the Department of Human Resources, the hospital, sheriff, ministers and industrial development boards.

Even though construction of the new school could last into 2018, the partnership’s work has already revitalized the area’s career and technical education programs, once known as vocational education.

The county’s centralized vocational high school had been closed for 13 years, and just a couple of programs survived at the general high schools. But if students were not zoned for the school with the cosmetology program, they could not participate.

The partnership succeeded in re-opening the shuttered school. Programs were expanded to include industrial maintenance, welding, nursing, biomedical and cosmetology. There is transportation so that any student could participate.

“The lives of people in rural Alabama are going to change for the better and for the long-term, and you can trace it all the way back to a single commissioner who had a vision for his community,” said Sonny Brasfield, ACCA executive director. “That’s a testament to the positive impact of county government in our state.”



In July, the Pickens County Herald printed an artist’s rendering of the soon-to-be-built Pickens County College and Career Center, made possible by an \$8 million bond issue by the Pickens County Board of Education.



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# Association salutes Sen. Gerald Dial

This year ACCA presented its highest honor, the Outstanding Contribution to County Government Award, to State Sen. Gerald Dial, recognizing him as a tireless champion for local transportation funding.

In 2016, Dial successfully sponsored Act 2016-150 creating the Alabama Transportation Safety Fund, which dictates higher levels of transparency and accountability for any new transportation dollars that might be raised in the next two years.

“Simply saying ‘thank you’ to Senator Dial is not enough. County officials owe him a deep debt of gratitude,” said ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield. “As the unified voice of county government, the Association expresses the strongest appreciation of all 67 counties for Senator Dial’s unwavering efforts.”

The Republican from Clay County is serving his 10th term in the Alabama Legislature, longevity that gives him special perspective on the transportation funding crisis. The last time lawmakers increased recurring infrastructure investment at the local level more than 20 years ago, he voted “aye” – testimony that an elected official can support increased revenue and survive.

During this year’s regular session, Dial also expended significant energy on a proposal that would have increased the gas tax by 6 cents per gallon. The measure, which would cost the average Alabama driver less than \$5 a month, did not come up for a vote.

With the Alabama Transportation Safety



*Inspecting a culvert on County Road 59 during the Randolph County DRIVE-Along Tour. From left, County Engineer Burrell Jones, Rep. Bob Fincher, Commissioner Terry Lovvorn and Sen. Gerald Dial.*

Fund in place, the senator has continued to advocate for funding to address this crisis. In advance of a special legislative session that began in August, Dial publicly urged his colleagues to vote on infrastructure funding.

“It’s obvious that the Legislature cannot continue to ignore the infrastructure crisis facing our state. The poor condition of Alabama’s roads and bridges is adversely

impacting the safety and overall quality of life of Alabama citizens – not to mention our economic development opportunities,” he said. “We must generate a new revenue source to provide enough money to fix our deteriorating transportation system.”

Though the senator only represents Senate District 13’s six counties, stretching about half the length of the state along the Alabama-Georgia line, he makes a far larger impact. “Senator Dial personally kicked off the DRIVE-Along Tours, setting an example that led many legislators around the state to get first-hand look at the crumbling roads in their districts,” Brasfield said. “Some nine months later, his insistence that this crisis needs immediate attention has only grown.” ■

*Outstanding Contribution to  
County Government 2016*

*Sen. Gerald Dial*

*Association of County Commissions  
of Alabama*

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*Marcus Campbell (Sumter),  
Dean Calvert (Blount),  
Tony Cherry (Sumter) and  
Rhondel Rhone (Clarke)*

## IN PROFILE

# Tony Cherry | ACCA Vice President

**W**ith a sharp focus on unifying the county voice, Tony Cherry brings a unique combination of gifts and experiences to his new responsibility as vice president of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama.

As you might expect, he has years of experience in public office, a strong track record of leadership in the Association and deep roots in the county he serves. He's also got more than two decades of experience officiating high school basketball games.

On the court, Cherry sees how teamwork can overcome seemingly impossible challenges. And he says teamwork is the reason that Alabama's counties have clinched



**Hon. Tony Cherry**

so many wins in the Alabama Legislature and other arenas.

"If we stand together, we've got strength in numbers," Cherry said. "That's the heart of '67 Counties, One Voice."

"We are excited about the leadership, energy and dedication Commissioner Cherry will provide for our

Association and our members," ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield said. "Tony thoroughly understands the challenges facing counties throughout this state, and he has both the temperament and the vision to help move county government forward statewide."

Cherry, 46, is unopposed on the November ballot for his third term on the Choctaw County

Commission. In the Association, Cherry stepped forward for leadership responsibilities during his first term. "If I am going to be a member of something, I want to get involved," he said, noting that the Association has helped him understand how county government is supposed to work.

Neighboring counties elected him twice to the ACCA Legislative Committee and twice to the Board of Directors. Then in 2014 and 2015, commissioners throughout the state elected him Minority Director.

In that role, "I was trying to preach togetherness, to ask each person to get involved," said Cherry, who holds Level II/Graduate certification from the Alabama Local Government Training Institute. "If there are issues, let's go through the proper channels."

The commissioner studied political science at Alabama



“*The Association has really taught me a lot as a public official – networking, meeting people, sharing my thoughts with other commissioners – and bringing something new to the table back home,*” Cherry said.

State University. Cherry began his public service with eight years on the city council in Pennington, where he and wife Teresia make their home. Together

they have four children and three granddaughters.

In his professional life, Cherry is a turbine operator for International Paper’s Containerboard Mill in Pine Hill. For recreation, he enjoys playing golf and hunting deer.

Cherry is also active in the community, chairing the local chapter of the Alabama State alumni organization and serving on the board for the Choctaw County High School alumni group. A deacon at Millwood Primitive Baptist Church, he is also active in a Masonic Lodge.

When it comes to commission business, Cherry said ACCA has been invaluable for Choctaw County, particularly with legislative assistance and insurance services, not to mention the benefit to him individually. “The Association has really taught me a lot as a public official – networking, meeting people, sharing my thoughts with other commissioners – and bringing something new to the table back home,” he said.

Under the traditional officer rotation, Cherry is expected to take the president’s gavel in 2018, and he knows he will put priority on “Unifying the County Voice.” It’s more than a philosophy – it’s every word of the strategic plan developed by TEAM 2021 and endorsed by the Association’s full membership.

He said, “That’s something we can stand on, and I want to see that we follow it through. ■



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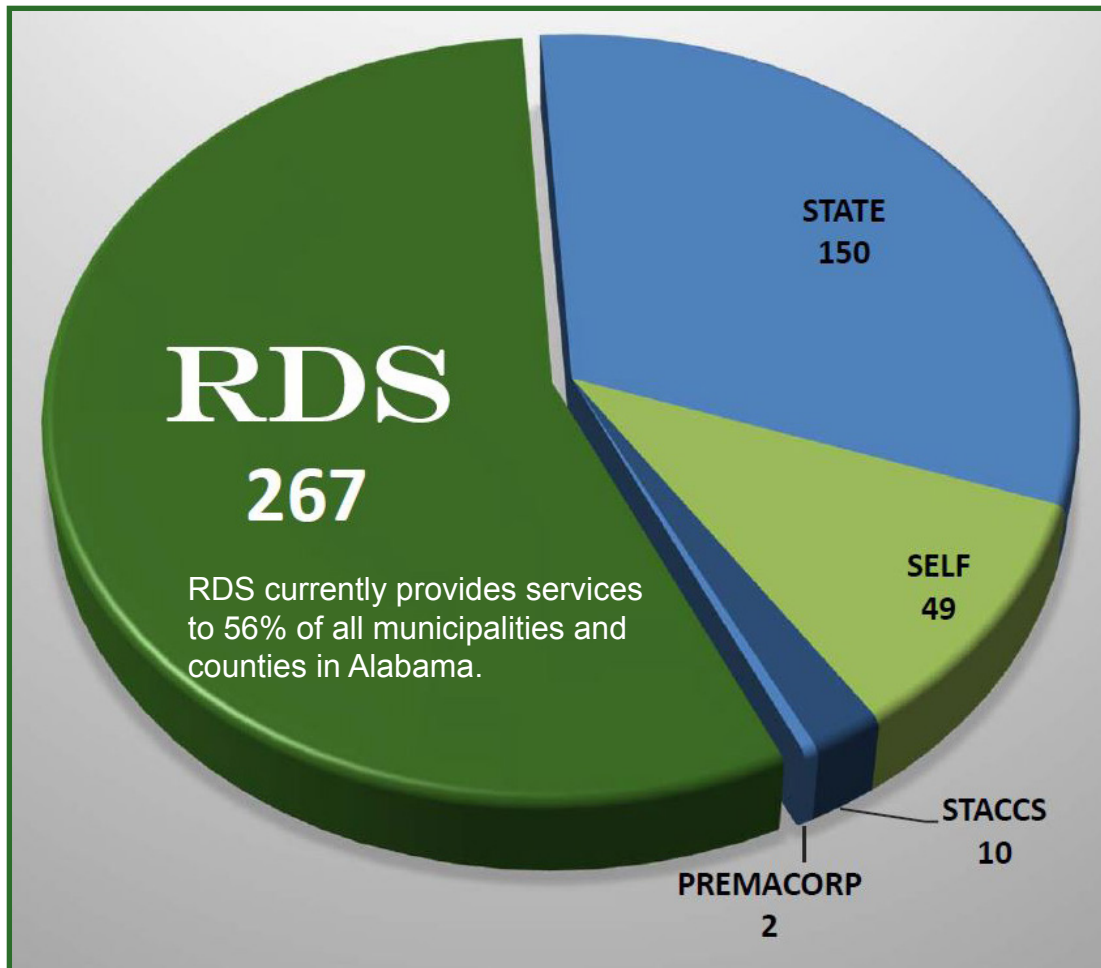


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**Gov. Robert Bentley, right, administers the oath of office to Nichelle Nix, director of the Governor's Office of Minority Affairs. Leroy Nix, her husband, holds the Bible.**  
 (Photo: Governor's Office)

## Nix: Connecting Women & Minorities with Opportunities

Meeting with the unified voice of county government is yet another first for the brand-new Alabama Governor's Office of Minority Affairs.

After all, the office was officially created in March of this year, when Gov. Robert Bentley signed Executive Order No. 15, to prioritize issues facing women and minorities, a commitment made after meeting with the Alabama Legislative Black Caucus.

Just two months later, Bentley signed legislation that formally established the Governor's Office of Minority Affairs and made its director a cabinet-level position that will continue through future administrations.

It was a groundbreaking move. Alabama is only the second state in the nation to have such an office, but is the first and only state to have an office that takes a comprehensive approach to focusing on women and minorities.

Nichelle Nix was sworn in as the office's first director in May, and just a few months later she travelled to ACCA's Annual Convention to meet specifically with the Association's Minority Issues Committee.

Committee members expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet face-to-face with the director and discuss common goals.

"The governor has taken an important step by creating this

office, and because of the broad scope of county government, we could easily have a role in many of the initiatives that are rolled out," said Tony Cherry, who chaired the meeting as the Association's 2015-16 minority director. "I am glad that we, as a committee, could open these lines of communication that will be essential to a good working relationship. We look forward to partnering with Ms. Nix to

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champion legislation and programs to better serve the needs of Alabama’s minority communities.”

The office, whose mission is to work for the success of minorities and women in Alabama, is a critical component of Bentley’s strategic vision known as the Great State 2019 Plan. The director will advise the governor’s administration on issues affecting minorities, including women, and will focus on the improvement of the overall quality of life of minorities, specifically in the areas of education, health, economics, political participation and empowerment, housing, employment, civil rights, criminal justice and race relations. The office is currently focusing on strengthening the support for minorities and women-owned businesses, workforce development, re-entry and rural health.

“**There are many segments of our community that need additional support and assistance, and it is my singular mission to connect minorities and women to opportunities that address their needs and help them reach their full potential,” said Nix.**

Nix is honored to support Governor Bentley’s mission to increase the overall quality of life for Alabama’s underrepresented populations. “The well-being of minorities and women will be my primary focus. There are many segments of our community that

need additional support and assistance, and it is my singular mission to connect minorities and women to opportunities that address their needs and help them reach their full potential,” said Nix.

A Mobile native, Nix earned a bachelor’s degree in political science from Spelman College in 2002. She earned a master’s of public health from Emory University and then her juris doctorate from the University of Alabama in 2008. Nix most recently worked as an attorney in the governmental and regulatory affairs division of Maynard, Cooper & Gale, P.C., in Birmingham.

She also has professional experience as legislative counsel to U.S. Rep. Artur Davis, a fellow at the Alabama Appleseed Center for Law and Justice and director of the Mobile office of the Sickle Cell Disease Association. ■

# Congratulations to these commissioners who completed education programs in 2016

Alabama Local Government Training Institute:  
A Partnership of ACCA & Auburn University’s  
Government & Economic Development Institute



## Level II

- Hon. Tucker Dorsey.....Baldwin County
- Hon. Chris Green..... Blount County
- Hon. Debbie Wood..... Chambers County
- Hon. Emmett Owen..... Cleburne County
- Hon. Bertha Kelly..... Coosa County
- Hon. Mark Blankenship..... Dale County
- Hon. Joey Statum.....Etowah County
- Hon. Lester “Bop” Brown.....Greene County
- Hon. Michael L. Williams.....Greene County
- Hon. Timothy Rhodes..... Hale County
- Hon. Dan England..... Marengo County
- Hon. Michael Thompson..... Marengo County
- Hon. Corey L. Morrow.....Monroe County
- Hon. Cedric Hudson..... Perry County
- Hon. Marion McIntosh..... Wilcox County
- Hon. John R. Moton, Jr..... Wilcox County

## Level I

- Hon. Chris Elliott..... Baldwin County
- Hon. Corey Cockrell..... Greene County
- Hon. Tommy Bowers..... St. Clair County
- Hon. Greg Atkinson..... Talladega County





*The inaugural members of PLAN, several of whom gave presentations about their “passion projects,” were honored at the 2016 ACCA Annual Convention.*

## Applications being accepted for leadership program

If you are a commissioner in position to begin your second term of office this November, there’s a question for you: Do you want to be a more effective leader in your county, your state and your Association? If you answered “yes,” then PLAN 2018 is for you.

PLAN, ACCA’s Practical Leadership Action Network, is a leadership development program for commissioners, chairs and chair/probate judges who were first elected in 2012 and who will begin their second term of office in November 2016. The two-year program will culminate with recognition at the 2018 ACCA Annual Convention, so the group will be known as PLAN 2018.

ACCA’s leadership wants to ensure a bright future for the Association for years to come, and PLAN is part of that effort. The program will equip participants

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**Winston County Commissioner Bobby Everett, left, and ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield**

impacts can be made through informal leadership roles, such as rallying colleagues to work on legislation, working to resolve a problem first noticed in one county that also creates difficulties for other counties, or taking the lead with an influential legislator.

Another aim of the PLAN program is to push participants to reexamine the passion that initially moved them to run for public office.

This is primarily accomplished with an intensive two-day retreat that is designed to draw out each person's individual leadership qualities and through the development and implementation of a community "passion project" to effect positive change in each participant's home county.

To be eligible, commissioners must have completed the mandatory level I education program through the Alabama Local Government Training Institute. Applications are due Nov. 21, 2016.

The selection process will not be completed until after election results are known, so eligible commissioners with opposition in November are encouraged to apply. ■

– who already have a demonstrated commitment to county government – to serve in both formal and informal leadership positions within ACCA. Formal leadership positions might include the ACCA Board of Directors, Legislative Committee or insurance fund governing boards. But history shows that significant

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*Russell County took home a Best of Category” honor in the 2016 NACo Achievement Awards for Crawford Park at the Historic Tuckabatchee Lodge, a project that combined aspects of historic preservation and recreation.*

## RUSSELL COUNTY

# ‘Place in Peril’ Now Gleams Like a Pearl

**“A**nd our first award goes to ... Russell County, Alabama.”

This summer, the president of the National Association of Counties (NACo) said those very words to a room filled with county leaders from all over the United States.

Then Commissioners Cattie Epps and Chance Corbett stepped onstage in California to accept a “Best of Category” honor in the 2016 NACo Achievement Awards for Crawford Park at the Historic Tuckabatchee Lodge.





Although that moment happened at NACo's annual meeting in July, Corbett still sounds elated talking about it weeks later – with good reason.

It all started because a community in the county's north end needed a park for children. And it wasn't just any community either. Crawford, though unincorporated now, was once the seat of Russell County government.

In the end, Crawford got much more than a few swings and some park benches, because the chosen site was home to a horrible eyesore, right on the main drag.



The two-story, wood-frame building, once served as a Masonic Lodge and community gathering place. Built in 1848, it is one of the few pre-Civil War fraternal halls still

*Before Crawford Park opened, families in this part of the county had to drive 15-20 miles to reach a playground.*

# CONGRATULATIONS

*to county staff members who completed  
County Government Education Institute programs in 2016*

## **Certified County Administrator**

Kevin Jones, Madison County

## **Certificate in County Administration**

Ron Cink, Baldwin County  
Susan Hill, Baldwin County  
Rachel Miller, Barbour County  
Janice Crockett, Butler County  
Amy Edmondson, Chambers County  
Sherri Foster, Chambers County  
Tim Burgess, Cherokee County  
Lisa Milinkovich, Cleburne County  
Kiep Johnson, Covington County  
Kimberly Erb, Elmore County  
Bob Manning, Jackson County  
Wendy Swann, Lee County  
Veronica Golatte, Macon County  
Edwina Harris, Macon County  
Amber Fisher, Marion County

Edith Gray, Mobile County  
Susan Holland, Mobile County  
Darren Martin, Mobile County  
Sandra Trimble, Mobile County  
Valerie Lockett, Perry County  
McKenzie Wilson, Pike County

## **Certificate in County Engineering Administration**

Winston Sitton, Blount County  
Daniel Lundy, Chambers County  
Corey Chambers, Cherokee County  
Tony Wearren, Chilton County

## **Certified County Revenue Officer**

Vicky Fisher, Cullman County

## **Certificate in Emergency Communication Administration**

Larry Daniels, Dale County  
Paula Simmons, Dale County  
Nicholas Beasley, Escambia County

## **Basic Level Certificate**

Michael Barton,  
Etowah County Sheriff's Office  
Bart Blackmon,  
Houston County Sheriff's Office  
Mary Howard Calhoun,  
Mobile County Sheriff's Office

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*67 Counties. One Voice*



standing in Alabama, but with wild vines climbing the stairs trellis-fashion to invade the second floor, nature was taking its toll.

It had been out of use for years, and a local philanthropist had saved it from demolition once. Things had gotten so bad that preservationists ranked the lodge among Alabama's top "Places in Peril" in 2012.

That was also the year that District 6 elected Corbett, a first-time commissioner. And he was bothered that families faced a 15-20 mile drive to the nearest playground.

As he looked for a park site, an almost 2-acre parcel in Crawford really stood out. The historic lodge happened to be there too, and the owner eventually agreed to a generous long-term lease with the county.



Then a citizens' committee went to work. Grants were secured. Fundraisers ranged from commemorative pavers to cow-patty bingo.

"I really thought the building was about to fall in," Corbett

recalls. But underneath asbestos siding and a roof of asphalt shingles, there was a hidden gem that is once again a community gathering place.

Historic Tuckabatchee Lodge's second floor is a Masonic museum, and the main floor was rented a hundred times in the first year for weddings, birthday parties, reunions, church functions and civic and corporate events.

Crawford Park also drew 500 people last year for breakfast with Santa. While children shared their Christmas wishes with the jolly

old elf inside, volunteers outside assembled playground equipment.

"Every time you go by, there are kids playing," Corbett said. "It's one of the best things I've ever been involved in." ■



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# The unified voice on the national stage

If anyone wondered whether the unified voice of county government was active at the federal level, any doubt could be erased with a quick look at this long list of Alabamians with responsibilities in the National Association of Counties.

Congratulations on your selection! And gratitude is expressed on behalf of all 67 counties for your efforts to shape federal policies impacting counties.

## *Executive Committee of NACo Board of Directors*

Merceria Ludgood (Mobile), South Region Representative

## *NACo Board of Directors*

Larry White (Escambia) and Debbie Wood (Chambers)

## *National Association of Black County Officials (NABCO) (a NACo affiliate)*

Bob Harrison (Madison), First Vice President; and Carolyn Parker (Etowah), South Region Representative

## *Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee*

Albert Turner (Perry), Vice Chair; Larry White (Escambia), Chair of Rural Development Subcommittee; Unzell Kelley (Coosa), Vice Chair

of Rural Development Subcommittee; Chad Floyd (Cullman), Ricky Harcrow (DeKalb), Bobby Burch (Lawrence), Jason Black (Limestone), Roger Jones (Madison), and Joseph Abston (Washington).

## *Community, Economic and Workforce Development Steering Committee*

Tyrone Moye (Clarke), Rhondel Rhone (Clarke), Joe Faulk (Elmore), Tim Choate (Etowah), Merceria Ludgood (Mobile), Frederick Kennedy (Pickens), and Thomas Coley (Tallapoosa).

## *Environment, Energy and Land Use Steering Committee*

Frank Burt (Baldwin), Fred Armstead (Marengo), and Chad Scroggins (Shelby).

## *Finance, Pensions and Intergovernmental Affairs Steering Committee*

Tucker Dorsey (Baldwin), Raye Ann Calton (Dale), Gary Teichmiller (Cullman), Carolyn Parker (Etowah), Karen Wadlington (Jefferson) and Gwendolyn Richardson (Monroe).





**Health Steering Committee**

Fred Wilson (Calhoun)

Alabamians serving with additional NACo groups:

**LUCC Steering Committee**

George Bowman (Jefferson)

**Human Services and Education Steering Committee**

Cattie Epps (Russell) and Drucilla Russ-Jackson (Sumter)

**Arts and Culture Commission**

Ricky Harcrow (DeKalb)

**Membership Standing Committee**

Merceria Ludgood (Mobile)

**Justice and Public Safety Steering Committee**

Robert Harrison (Madison), Vice Chair of Law Enforcement Subcommittee; Chris Elliott (Baldwin), Roy Waite (Clarke), Eric Jones (Elmore), Sherrie Kelley (Etowah) and Herschel Hicks (Morgan).

**Defined Contribution and Retirement Advisory Committee**

George Bowman (Jefferson) and Sonny Brasfield (ACCA)

**Next Generation NACo Network**

Unzell Kelley (Coosa), Donald Anderson (Hale), Albert Turner (Perry), Frederick Kennedy (Pickens), Thomas Coley (Tallapoosa)

**Immigration Reform Task Force**

Kim Ballard (Dallas)

**Information Technology Standing Committee**

Bob Harrison (Madison), Drucilla Russ-Jackson (Sumter)

**RAC Steering Committee**

Unzell Kelley (Coosa), Ricky Harcrow (DeKalb), Larry White (Escambia), Albert Turner (Perry), Thomas Coley (Tallapoosa)

**Transportation Steering Committee**

Richie Beyer (Elmore), Vice Chair of Highway/Highway Safety Subcommittee; Skip Gruber (Baldwin), Josh Harvill (Chambers), and Houston Matthews (Madison).

**International Economic Development Task Force**

Unzell Kelley (Coosa), Merceria Ludgood (Mobile), Albert Turner (Perry)

**Veterans and Military Services Committee**

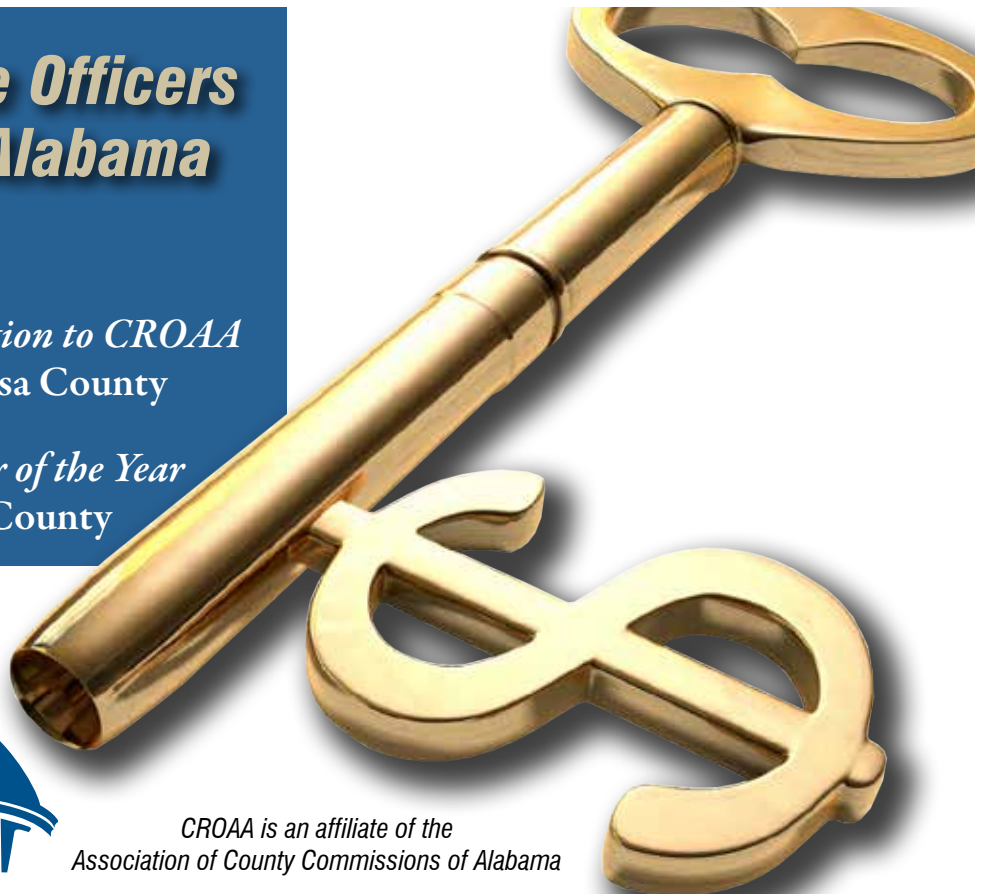
George Bowman (Jefferson), Committee Chairman ■

***County Revenue Officers Association of Alabama Awards 2016***

- *Outstanding Contribution to CROAA*  
Jayne Pearce, Tuscaloosa County
- *County Revenue Officer of the Year*  
Amy Beard, Madison County



*CROAA is an affiliate of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama*



*Graduation day in Auburn for Josh McDougald, assistant engineer in Butler County and class of 2013, with his uncle Patrick McDougald, Barbour County engineer and AU class of 1988.*



## County family, McDougald style

**A**t first glance it might look like Patrick McDougald wooed his nephew into county engineering, sweet-talking him into following his footsteps.

After all, Patrick is a long-time county engineer in Alabama who is devoted to the profession and county government in general. A past president of the Association of County Engineers of Alabama, he is fiercely loyal to ACEA and its parent group, the Association of County Commissions of Alabama.

“That ‘67 counties, One voice’ thing is not just words,” he said. “We literally do feel like a family.”

And his nephew Josh McDougald is, in fact, a young civil engineer on a career path similar to his uncle’s. Josh is currently assistant engineer in Butler County, working for another prominent, long-serving county engineer.

But the truth is much more interesting, because the real work – more gritty than glamorous – of a county road department is what won him over.

A military brat, Josh only saw his uncle on holidays until he settled in Enterprise for high school.

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A few years later, Josh was trying to choose among engineering disciplines, and the finalists were electrical, mechanical and civil. Fortuitously, his mom pointed out that his uncle was a civil engineer and might have some insight.

And Patrick did have an opinion, expressed with brutal honesty. “He told me unless you want to sit behind a computer the rest of your life, you need to go into civil,” recalled Josh, who says he is outdoorsy. “Career-wise, he did me a huge favor.”

“He made that choice on his own,” Patrick said. “Introducing him to Henry Hawkins, that’s all I did.”

In 2011, when Josh transferred to Auburn University, Hawkins was the engineer in nearby Chambers County. He had an established program for a few Auburn engineering students to work year-round, and Josh went to work for him part-time.

Later Josh did some student work in Lee County, graduated in 2013, and stayed on with Lee County until about a year ago.

Josh, now 25, believes that he got this job because of his four years of work history in county engineering and the accompanying good reference from Chambers County.

And it sounds like his last name could have been Smith or Jones or Wilson, as far as his boss Dennis McCall is concerned.

While knowing that no one could walk in the door and make the same impact as the previous assistant who had 20 years on the job, McCall had high expectations. “I had to have someone with a good mix of experience to hit the ground running,” McCall said. “He’s young and energetic and very sharp.”

For his part, Josh says he likes the variety, where you’re working on a construction project one minute,

subdivision regulations the next and then onto flood plain management.

“It’s a versatile job. You don’t do the same thing two days in a row, especially in a smaller county,” he said, with praise for the retirement benefits and four-day weeks too.

And he is outside a lot. In August, the county had active resurfacing projects from the Alabama Transportation Rehabilitation and Improvement Program (ATRIP) as well as continuing flood damage repairs from December.

Patrick retires soon from Barbour County with almost 28 years in county engineering. He expects to continue to field calls from Josh, but he has largely handed off a 17-county joint bid program to his nephew.

“He’s very organized, thinks outside the box. And he realized at an early age that what’s good for one county is good for every county,” Patrick said. ■

## PLAN 2016 INAUGURAL CLASS OF THE Practical Leadership Action Network

**MISSION STATEMENT:** PLAN 2016 is an 18-month journey for second-term county commissioners to collectively enhance their passion, service and common vision to overcome conflict, divisiveness and limited resources in order to energize and improve the quality of life for Alabama counties and the Association.

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- Hon. Marcus Campbell, *Sumter County*
- Hon. Bobby Everett, *Winston County*



### Extra help turns into pipeline linking civil engineers & counties

Over about the last 20 years, a one rural county's program for college engineering students has had quite an influence on county engineering in Alabama.

It began when Henry Hawkins was the engineer in Chambers County. Shorthanded like most small counties, he started hiring civil engineering students from Auburn University to work part-time.

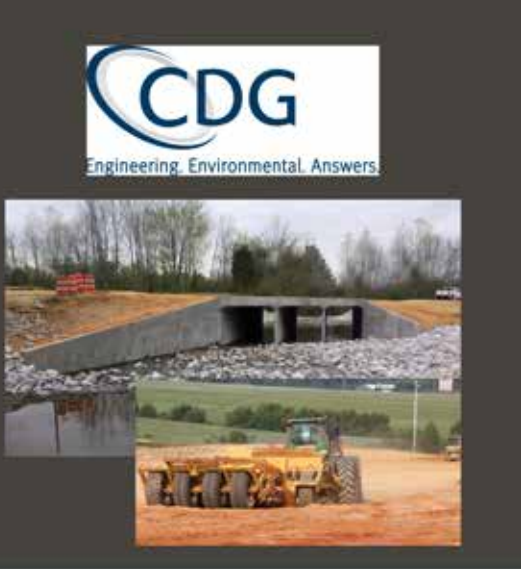
Today there are three engineering students working in the county, including the sons of Lowndes County's engineer and Autauga County's assistant engineer.

"Not only do we get a ton out of it on our side, at the same time, they get the experience," said the current engineer in Chambers County, Josh Harvill, himself a product of the student program. At least five counties have assistant engineers who are also alumni of the program.

When Butler County hired an assistant engineer last year, there were applicants with a decade or more experience with engineering firms or other branches of government. "But somebody with just a few years' experience in a county engineering department was more valuable," said County Engineer Dennis McCall. ■



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# Saving time, money with more joint bidding

The “67 counties, One voice” strategy is highly effective at the state level, and one of the Association’s priorities over the next five years is to increase regional cooperation among counties.

One group of counties is leading the charge with a regional joint bid program organized by county engineers.

The program originated in what was the Alabama Department of Transportation’s 7th Division, where counties have operated an annual joint bid project for roughly a decade. The initiative, spearheaded by Barbour County Engineer Patrick McDougald, has focused on items outside the state and ACCA bid lists.

McDougald says the process has resulted in proven savings of time and money. Increased buying power led to more competitive pricing, and duplication of effort has been reduced because each county handled the bid process for only a few items, ranging from geotextiles to grader blades.

For example, for the year just ending, Crenshaw County awarded the bid for precast bridge components. So Crenshaw County oversaw development of specifications, handled advertising, solicited bids from a combined vendor list (of all participating counties), reviewed bids to determine the lowest responsible bidder and made the award.

Any of the participating counties could get that price, but utilization by individual counties was voluntary.

With ALDOT’s reorganization, those original 7th Division counties are welcoming others from the

Southeast Region and beyond. “We were seeing variations in what we were paying,” said Butler County Engineer Dennis McCall.

With 17 counties opting in, the project

has roughly doubled in size:

- Autauga • Barbour • Bullock •**
- Butler • Chambers • Coffee •**
- Covington • Crenshaw • Dale**
- Elmore • Geneva • Henry •**
- Houston • Lee • Lowndes •**
- Pike • Russell**

Legally it works because all participating counties adopted resolutions pursuant to Act 2000-153, which authorizes two or more counties to enter into agreements for the joint bidding and purchase

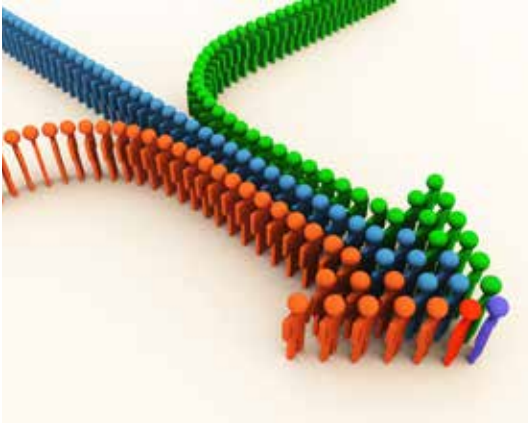
of items required to be bid under Alabama’s competitive bid law.

Patrick McDougald has again been the driving force, and, as his retirement nears, the transition is already well underway. “That’s going to be my legacy to Josh,” he said, referring to his nephew Josh McDougald, assistant engineer in Butler County.

In many ways, this regional project is a mini version of ACCA’s statewide County Joint Bid Program, which can trace its roots back nearly 20 years ago to three counties that all needed to buy excavators.

It appears that once again a collaborative effort by a small group of counties could ultimately expand to benefit all 67. “The future goal would be to eventually phase some if not all of these items over to the ACCA joint bid,” Patrick McDougald wrote to colleagues.

The statewide County Joint Bid Program’s mainstays have been heavy equipment, herbicides and road sign materials. In the service category, disaster debris removal and monitoring were added in the last decade. In response to member requests, ACCA is adding corrugated metal pipe for 2017. ■



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## TEAM 2021 REPORT

# *Unifying the County Voice*

### Goal III

**Unify the County VOICE by Placing an Enhanced Emphasis on Public Awareness of County Government Responsibilities and Activities.**

## IMPLEMENTATION

**Encourage** the promotion of the county commissions' local programs by establishing the regular delivery of press release templates and media packets to be utilized at the local level to increase the visibility of county commission activities in the community.

**Develop** a multi-faceted mechanism to promote county accomplishments – both internally and externally –with a special emphasis on touting cooperation among multiple counties as a means to further develop the '67 Counties, ONE Voice' brand.

**Utilize** local and statewide media in a proactive way to further promote the Association's County Platform through regular media releases, blogs, social media campaigns, etc.

**Assist** counties with efforts to start public dialogue around important local issues or initiatives by providing more hands-on assistance and guidance with social media, campaign development, and advocacy strategies.

**Establish** a hands-on training program on the use of electronic communication to assist counties with improving their social media presence.

## ACCA STRATEGIC PLAN

# Enhancing public awareness of county government

*Editor's Note – County Commission Magazine is beginning a new regular feature called "Unifying the County Voice" to provide updates on implementation of the Association's strategic plan.*

**L**ess than a year ago, Alabama's 67 counties adopted a strategic plan charting the Association's course for the next five years.

The plan is detailed in the "TEAM 2021 Report: Unifying the County Voice," so named because the 10 goals represent 10 different, but specific ways to unify the county voice – covering the gamut from enhanced member participation to expanded research capabilities.

The report caps a multi-year effort driven by a group of county officials and employees from across the state, known as TEAM 2021, who developed a working outline of strategic goals. Their work was informed by surveys of the Association's membership, a critical review of the 2015 Task Force Report, comments from the ACCA Board of Directors, and TEAM member insights based on the Association's current performance.

Ultimately, the final report was approved by vote of the Association's full membership at



the 2015 Legislative Conference in Auburn, Alabama.

Again and again through the process, county leaders expressed a desire to boost public awareness of county government, which is reflected in Goal III:

**Unify the County VOICE  
by Placing an Enhanced Emphasis  
on Public Awareness  
of County Government  
Responsibilities and Activities.**

This high priority on helping others better understand the responsibilities and activities of county government had such widespread support that implementation began not just right away – but even before the TEAM 2021 report was finalized.

The best example would have to be the DRIVE Alabama (Developing a Road &

Infrastructure Vision for Everyone in Alabama) campaign, and other initiatives, like the statewide impact of a six-cents increase at the gas pump, are in the works.

With DRIVE Alabama, county engineers initially started the campaign to focus attention on the silent crisis in local transportation, but it evolved into a full-fledged statewide movement.

“We would not be where we are today – with the Alabama Transportation Safety Fund enacted and having serious conversations about new revenue – without DRIVE Alabama,” said Sonny Brasfield, ACCA executive director.

“Legislators who have seen the best and worst of their county roads and bridges in person, through one of the many Drive-Along County Road Tours, are some of the strongest advocates for a solution,” he continued.

The multi-faceted campaign has been active about a year. In its earliest phase, every county released a custom, two-page template showing the positive impact of the Alabama Transportation Rehabilitation and Improvement Program (ATRIP) on the local area, with statistics about job creation, business benefits, and detour miles for school buses.

Other elements have included an informative website ([www.DriveAlabama.org](http://www.DriveAlabama.org)), an active social media presence and a citizen survey to identify priority needs. To date, the DRIVE Alabama website has over 12,000 views, and the Facebook page alone has over 2,200 followers, has received more than 16,000 likes, and has reached over 86,000 citizens.

Unlike many educational campaigns, the DRIVE Alabama efforts were not supported by a high-dollar advertising budget. Instead, the

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- 2. DeKalb County
- 3. Russell County

**Category 2**

- 1. Barbour County
- 2. Chambers County
- 3. Pickens County

**Category 3**

- 1. Henry County
- 2. Marion County
- 3. Coosa County

growth of the campaign relied solely on the grassroots efforts of county engineers and local officials. Needless to say, social media, local newspapers and word of mouth have played a huge role in DRIVE Alabama's ability to spread a broad message across Alabama's 67 counties, despite having limited financial resources.

While some legislators have used Facebook to poll constituents, DRIVE's social media has been used to educate Alabamians about the tremendous need for new infrastructure investments. In fact, a video showing the deplorable conditions of school bus routes on some of Geneva County's unpaved roads has racked up more than 24,000 views.

This goal to enhance public awareness also calls for highlighting

regional cooperation among counties, and there were multiple instances of counties banding together for the DRIVE-Along



Tours. These joint tours may have started as a convenience for legislators with sprawling districts, but they also reinforce the fact that this is a statewide problem that requires a statewide solution.

Most recently, counties have been preparing to roll out some key

messages related to the long-term impact of a 6-cent increase in the gas tax. Each county has an attractive, one-page, 10-Year Plan that details the local impact in road miles and linear feet of new bridge the increase would generate over the next decade. This phase has also generated a new social media hashtag: #just6cents

"You know you've got some traction when legislators and lobbyists at the Statehouse reference the DRIVE Alabama campaign in the conversation about new road and bridge investments," said Terri Reynolds, the ACCA director of public affairs. "County engineers really took this project and ran with it. Their energy has inspired the staff to develop even more advocacy tools for county officials to use ahead of the 2017 legislative session." ■

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# Mobilizing & Energizing Affiliate Organizations

In an effort to further involve the ACCA affiliate groups in the Association’s legislative process, each affiliate legislative group has been invited to serve on President Bill Strickland’s 2017 Legislative Review Task Force.

This Task Force was convened to provide recommendations to the Association’s elected Legislative Committee in the development of the 2017 Legislative Platform. These groups will meet at the ACCA headquarters over the course of four weeks, with the first meetings scheduled for late September.

Additionally, each affiliate group has been assigned a primary point of contact on the ACCA staff to further ensure that affiliate members receive timely information on legislative and administrative issues.

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# A voice from Alabama's 67 counties

## Marcus Campbell

*Sumter County Commissioner,  
& Minority Director,  
Association of County  
Commissions of Alabama (ACCA)*



**Q** Would you tell us about your county and district?

**A** Sumter County is located in west-central Alabama, and I have the second largest district geographically. Sumter County, a rural county, is a beautiful place with a great deal of potential for economic growth and utilization of its natural resources. Timber is the No. 1 industry in the county; therefore, there is a ton of acreage in the county. Local companies, neighboring counties, and the state of Mississippi have companies in the county that cut and transport timber to mills in the county or to other mills in the state. One of the largest companies in the county is Waste Management, which employed over 500 people here when I was in high school. Due to setbacks, Waste Management downsized to approximately 50 employees but, thanks be to God, they are back on the climb by employing more people and their production is improving day by day. Therefore, this will be a major boost for our county. Also, one of the largest engines in the county is the University of West Alabama. Sumter County is a great place to live, work, and play.

**Q** In addition to your public service on the commission, what do you do professionally?

**A** Recently I had the opportunity to work with the Black Belt Community Foundation (BBCF) as a project manager for a grant received from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, part of President Obama's "My Brother's Keepers Initiative." This grant was for young men and boys of color. I am so grateful for the BBCF and President Felecia Lucky for contacting me about the chance to work with 10 organizations from around the Black Belt. In addition, I am working towards being a better cattleman, which I am not doing as a hobby, but I am trying to build as a productive business.

**Q** Why do people always ask you about basketball?

**A** I developed a love for basketball at an early age. From Livingston Jr. High School, to Livingston High School, to the University of Alabama, and playing professionally for eight seasons in

Europe, I am so grateful for my coaches, the late Levon Puckett, George Hale, Kenneth

Threadgill and

Alabama Sports Hall of Famer Nelson R. Hughes. I was blessed at the University of Alabama playing for Wimp Sanderson. While in Europe, I was able to play for teams in Holland, France and Belgium. And I traveled to many other countries for European Cup Games. My career ended with an ACL knee injury.

**Q** How is the sport a part of your life today?

Basketball has been and will always be a magnificent part of my life. What I find most rewarding is the opportunity to host an annual non-profit basketball camp. This past year we held the 16th Annual Marcus Campbell "Future Star" Basketball Camp where boys and girls come from many neighboring counties in west Alabama, east Mississippi, and even Detroit,



Michigan. Former SEC standouts Byron Franklin, Mario Austin, Earnest Brown, Bryant Lancaster, Terrence Meade, Erwin Dudley, and my cousin, 18-year NBA veteran Charles Oakley, come and not only teach basketball fundamentals but life skills as well.

**Q** What are some of the Association activities that have helped you grow more effective as a commissioner?

**A** PLAN 2016 was introduced last year in Perdido and this class is for second-term commissioners. I am so grateful to be a part of the groundbreaking class. Our Executive Director, Sonny Brasfield, and all the wonderful people in the Association office discussed and came up with this concept. This course has been great for me

0:00

## SPEED DRILL with Marcus Campbell

**Favorite football team?** *Alabama Crimson Tide*  
**| Cats or dogs?** *Neither*  
**| Favorite holiday?** *Christmas* | **No. 1 quality you look for in co-workers?** *Mutual respect* | **How do you take your coffee?** *Cream and sugar* | **Dine in or eat out?** *Eat out* | **Is the glass half full or half empty?** *Half full* | **I wanted to be \_\_\_\_\_ when I grew up.** *Professional basketball player* | **What's the next thing you want to binge watch?** *Rocky Balboa Marathon*

and to make sure that if there is a concern, that all parties will discuss the concern and respond back to whomever is involved.

as a servant for service, and it has helped me to seek out knowledge and gain wisdom from other county commissioners as well as build a bond with them. We discuss ideas and concerns about different issues that have happened in their county and vice versa. I have been enlightened on how to handle different situations and problems.

**Q** How would you describe your priorities as minority director?

**A** My priorities include letting every county know that I am here to listen to what they have to say, to build a strong relationship with the Board,

**Q** As minority director, you serve as chairman of the Association's Minority Issues Committee. What do you see as some of the most pressing issues for this group to address?

**A** All issues are important. If and when there is an issue, I want to make sure that we have done all that we can to address it. I encourage each county and all county commissioners to not sit on the bench, but bring their concerns directly to me.

**Q** What does "67 counties, One voice" mean to you?

**A** Frankie Beverly featuring Maze says it best, "We are One." We are the State of Alabama. Let's be team-minded, team-focused, and team-oriented. Let's work together for what is best for the State of Alabama. ■

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