

**COMMERCE – A CITY ON THE RIGHT TRACK**

The City of Commerce is located in Jackson County along Interstate 85 approximately 20 miles north of Athens and 70 miles northeast of Atlanta. The most recent population estimate is in excess of 6600. Present day Commerce was inhabited by the Creeks and Cherokees prior to arrival of European settlers. The Lacoda Trail, which extended from present day Athens through Commerce to the north Georgia Mountains, was a significant trade and travel route through the area. S.R. 334 follows a nine mile section of the ancient trail and was designated the ‘Lacoda Trail Memorial Parkway’ by the Georgia General Assembly. A trading post named Harmony Grove was established in the area in 1808. The Harmony Grove Female Academy became the first all-female school chartered by the state legislature on December 20, 1824, and the Harmony Grove Post Office was established on October 14, 1825. The Town of Harmony Grove was incorporated on December 24, 1884. It was reincorporated and named Commerce in 1904. Harmony Grove Mills was once a major feature of the City, processing and producing textiles from 1893 until 2004. Notable persons who were born or lived in the City include former NFL star Terry Allen, Country Music singer/songwriter Bill Anderson, former Georgia Attorney General Mike Bowers, and two-term Governor Lamartine G. Hardman. Today’s City leadership includes Mayor **Clark Hill**, Councilmembers **Keith Burchett, Archie Chaney, John Eubanks, Darren Owensby, Mark Fitzpatrick,** and **Bobby Redmon,** and City Manager **James Wascher.**



*Governor Hardman House*



*Mainstreet*



*Boys & Girls Club*



*First Baptist Church*

**MAP-21 & LOCAL ROAD ACTIVITY (LRA) REPORTING**

The statewide MAP-21 initiative is underway! This program features a unique partnership between the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), the University of Georgia’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government ITOS Division (ITOS), and the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions (GARC). The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission is working closely with its communities, county-by-county, to verify and collect a variety of local road data, including road names, ownership, number of lanes, surface type, and traffic control devices. Work conducted under the MAP-21 program will help meet the state’s Federal reporting requirements under the MAP-21 (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century) initiative.

***How up-to-date are your local roads in the Georgia Department of Transportation’s (GDOT) data?***

In addition to providing a comprehensive, statewide local road dataset, the MAP-21 process is highlighting discrepancies between local communities’ road data and the centerlines shown in GDOT’s records. Every time a public, local road is constructed, named/re-named, re-routed,

removed/abandoned, widened, lengthened, and/or paved (when previously unpaved), local governments should be going through the Local Road Activity (LRA) process to notify GDOT of those changes. As NEGRC staff work through MAP-21 reviews, they will notify your community of any data inconsistencies and, if necessary, provide guidance for larger-scale "batch" LRAs.

### **Have you been reporting your Local Road Activity (LRA)?**

All local governments should have LRA reporting incorporated into their regular procedures for the construction, modification, and abandonment of public roads.

For further information, visit [www.dot.ga.gov/PS/Local](http://www.dot.ga.gov/PS/Local) or contact **Eva Kennedy**, NEGRC GIS Planner at [ekennedy@negrc.org](mailto:ekennedy@negrc.org) or **(706) 369-5650**.

## **ACCG CONFERENCE HELD AT UGA**

ACCG held the 2018 Newly Elected Commissioners Conference on December 4<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> at the University of Georgia Center for Continuing Education in Athens-Clarke County. The four-day event was dedicated to preparing 140 new officials with the tools needed to efficiently serve their constituents. During the Conference officials heard firsthand testimonies from the 2016 newly elected Commissioners during their first term, learned of the core basics about county government, and established relationships with county and state counterparts. NEGRC Executive Director and GARC Past President **Jim Dove** was invited to participate in the Resource Reception held during the Conference to provide information on the 12 regional commissions and the state association. Northeast Georgia counties were well represented at the event.



*Jim Dove, Harry Lange,  
and Adam Mestres*

## **FIREFLY TRAIL UPDATE – MUCH TO LOOK FORWARD TO IN 2019**



Across the country, communities are converting disused railroad corridors into multiuse paths for bicycling, walking, running, inline skating, and, occasionally, equestrian use. In Northeast Georgia the abandoned Athens Branch of the Georgia Railroad is the subject of one such rails-to-trails conversion.

Harkening back to how locals referred to locomotives that released bright embers into the air, the Firefly Trail's name recalls the importance of the corridor to the communities from Union Point to Athens. From 1841, when the Athens Branch linked into the existing line from Augusta to Union Point, the rail line was a vital source of transportation and economic activity for Athens, Winterville, Arnoldsville, Crawford,

Maxeys, Woodville, Union Point, and Clarke, Oglethorpe, and Greene Counties.

Abandoned in 1984, the line sat idle until Athens-Clarke County formed a Rails-to-Trails Committee to explore and implement its evolution into a facility that would once again benefit the community. After years of planning, the first one-mile segment of the 39-mile planned trail opened to the public from its terminus at East Broad St. in downtown Athens to Old Winterville Rd. near Lexington Rd./Loop 10. Included in this section is a spectacular 500-foot long bridge over the North Oconee River that sits atop remnant piers left over from the railroad's operation. Athens-Clarke voters funded additional construction of their community's eight-mile section through SPLOST and T-SPLOST programs, with additional construction in Winterville projected to take place within the next year. Another significant architectural landmark is set for work in the near future: crossing the project's only other major stream, Trail Creek, at original railroad grade will require investment in a second centerpiece construction or restoration project (designs are to be determined).

Further down the line in Oglethorpe and Greene Counties, Maxeys and Union Point have both been awarded funding by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources through the federal Recreational Trails Program. In both communities, Local Action Groups are working with the nonprofit corporation, Firefly Trail, Inc., and municipal and county governments to acquire property, master-plan trail alignment and amenities such as benches, clear vegetation, and lay asphalt or concrete. Construction on both projects should take place in 2019.

An interesting and unique aspect of the Firefly Trail, as compared to other rail-trails (whose surfaces are typically either hard-paved or a softer dirt or gravel tread), is the planned combination of a main, paved trail with a secondary side-path for mountain-bike and equestrian travel where feasible. This will connect six miles of off-road cycling trails at Athens's Trail Creek Park with another 20+ miles at Union Point's Hart Farms and Corry House. It will also take advantage of the popularity of horse riding in the more rural parts of our region, allowing the trail to appeal to an even more diverse set of user groups.

Beyond the conventional air and water quality, health and exercise, and community benefits of similar projects, the Firefly Trail will serve as a powerful tool for economic development. A Georgia Department of Transportation-funded study by a professor of economics at the Georgia Institute of Technology found that the completed trail will generate \$14.7 million/year in direct impact and draw 1.13 million users per year. Construction alone will create 158 jobs and a 1.33:1 return on investment for every dollar spent.

The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission was a leader in the early conception of this rail-trail as a multi-jurisdictional project and has continued to play a key role in project planning, technical resources, and working collaboratively with local governments and Firefly Trail, Inc. For additional information, please contact NEGRC Principal Planner **John Devine**, AICP, at [jdevine@negrc.org](mailto:jdevine@negrc.org) or **(706) 369-5650**.

### **REMINDER**

The next meeting of the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission Council will be held on **Thursday, January 17<sup>th</sup> at Noon at the Athens Holiday Inn**. Information on the meeting will be forthcoming.

## BARROW COUNTY RESIDENT'S SUCCESS

**Steven Parr**, a Barrow County resident, graduated from Lanier Technical College with a Radiography Technology Degree. He is employed at the Sleep and Sinus Centers of Georgia as a CT Technologist (Computed Tomography). He works 40 hours per week earning \$23.00 per hour.

Mr. Parr was eligible for funding available through the WorkSource Northeast Georgia's Youth division due to being less than 25 years of age and parenting. His motivation for pursuing further education was to be a successful and positive role model for his daughter, to demonstrate to her the importance of education, and to prove hard work pays off.

Before Mr. Parr heard about WorkSource Northeast Georgia, he had "lost hope" in returning to school, but our program alleviated his financial stress entirely. WorkSource Northeast Georgia provided money for his tuition, books, scrubs, and other school supplies. In addition, WorkSource Northeast Georgia provided funds to help with transportation and childcare costs, and paid his wages for a work experience internship. Mr. Parr feels "very fortunate" for the funding that allowed him to graduate debt-free!



Mr. Parr doesn't want similar parents to feel "held back", and encourages them to pursue further education. He was appreciative of the easy communication and support from the staff.

For information about WorkSource Northeast Georgia programs and services, call our office at **(706) 369-5703**.

Mr. Parr

## NEGRC DIRECTOR HONORED BY JCCO

Executive Director **Jim Dove** was honored on December 8<sup>th</sup> at the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Achievement Awards Banquet of Jackson County Community Outreach (JCCO). Dove received the 2018 Community Leadership Award "For Excellence in Leadership as Demonstrated by Outstanding Community Service in Jackson County". Founded in 1998, JCCO is a civic-based, charitable, non-profit, all volunteer group that is dedicated to educational support, economic growth, and citizen community involvement. Each year, JCCO awards college scholarships to deserving Jackson County high school students planning to attend two or four-year institutions. Since its inception, 208 scholarships totaling \$218,500 have been awarded. In 2016, JCCO also began awarding technical scholarships, in the amount of \$2,000, to students wishing to pursue training in specific needed areas at accredited technical colleges. JCCO is led by President **Jim Scott** and a dedicated Board of Directors, with assistance from an External Advisory Committee and community servants. Dove stated "I am deeply honored and privileged to receive an award from an organization so dedicated to improving the quality of life in my home county".



Scott with Dove

## DCA RELEASES 2019 SCHEDULE OF SURVEYS AND REPORTS

In addition to Georgia's comprehensive planning and Service Delivery Strategy requirements, all counties, municipalities, and local authorities must report annually to the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) Office of Research and Surveys. The 2019 reporting calendar is now available through the DCA's website at: [dca.ga.gov/sites/default/files/2019\\_dca\\_office\\_of\\_research\\_reporting\\_calendar.pdf](http://dca.ga.gov/sites/default/files/2019_dca_office_of_research_reporting_calendar.pdf)

Requirements for local governments include Contact Information, Government Management Indicators Survey (GOMI), Wage & Salary Survey (*voluntary*), Hotel/Motel Tax Report (*where applicable*), Report of Local Government Finances (RLGF), and Debt Issuance Report. Local authorities must provide DCA with information related to registration, finances, and debt issuance.

*Local governments must have submitted the three most recent calendar years' GOMI surveys and the three most recent fiscal years' RLGF to be eligible for any funding administered by DCA.* Compliance status is listed at: [apps.dca.ga.gov/LocalGovStatus/financial.asp](http://apps.dca.ga.gov/LocalGovStatus/financial.asp)

Since the Regional Commissions do not work directly with the State of Georgia on Surveys and Reports, *please use the following DCA contacts for questions and additional information:*

**General Information**  
DCA.Research@dca.ga.gov

**Local Government Contact Information, GOMI, Wage & Salary Survey, Authority Registration**  
**Norma Allen**, (404) 679-3132  
norma.allen@dca.ga.gov

**Combined Authority Registration and Financial Support**  
**Tyler Reinagel**, (404) 679-4996  
tyler.reinagel@dca.ga.gov

**Hotel/Motel Tax, Local Government Finances, Debt Issuance (Local Gov. and Authorities)**  
**Eric Lopez**, (404) 679-3127  
eric.lopez@dca.ga.gov

## COUNTY MANAGERS' MEETING HELD

The NEGRC's first County Managers' Meeting held in November was a success! Guest speaker **Charlotte Davis**, Georgia Municipal Association's Governmental Relations Associate, gave a presentation of the FCC ruling on the deployment of small cells, and NEGRC's Project Specialist, **Monica Sagastizado**, gave a presentation on the Achieving Connectivity Everywhere (ACE) Act. The next meeting will be held **February 14, 2019** at NEGRC Headquarters. Managers will be given an in-depth overview of the county-based program of the U.S. Census Update and its Participant Statistical Area Program (PSAP). For additional information, please contact Ms. Sagastizado at [msagastizado@negrc.org](mailto:msagastizado@negrc.org) or (706) 369-5650.



Meeting Participants



305 Research Drive  
Athens, GA 30605

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# Update

## REGIONAL MEETINGS JANUARY

8	8:30 a.m.	Workforce Development Board	NEGRC Atrium
17	Noon	NEGRC Council	Athens Holiday Inn
17	3:30 p.m.	Firefly Trails Advocacy Group	E. H. Culpepper Conference Room
23	9:00 a.m.	Upper Oconee Basin Water Authority	E. H. Culpepper Conference Room



*Sincerely & Respectfully,*