



First Courthouse

THE VOICE OF MORGAN COUNTY

Keeping you informed / Telling untold stories



Current Courthouse

Postal Customer

PRSR STD
US POSTAGE PAID
DECATUR AL
PERMIT #869

MORGAN COUNTY COMMISSION

March 2015

VOLUME 3, NO. 2

Morgan saw 14% sales tax hike in 2014

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

Morgan County had a 14.26% increase in sales tax collections last year, which yielded more revenue for all school systems in the county, according to Sales Tax Director Michelle Echols.

"I cannot pinpoint any one thing that brought the increase, but it's likely due to a number of reasons. For instance, we had new businesses to come in and the faithfulness of residents shopping in the county," Echols said. "Another thing that contributed to the increase is that we make sure businesses are filing and remitting taxes."

Businesses remit taxes each month and for those who don't Echols' office enforces payment.

"The enforcement of sales tax from the business owner who decides to violate the law by failing to collect, file and/or pay over the collected sales tax plays a role in the increase as well," Echols said. "Business owners or responsible parties must keep in mind the sales tax is a trust fund tax, and the business collecting the tax is presumed to hold it in trust for the benefit of the government to whom it is due."

"The revenue comes from retail and industrial businesses throughout the county," she said.

The 2014 total was \$20,944,904.09 compared to the 2013 collection, which was \$18,330,904.72.

The money is distributed to Morgan County, Hartselle and Decatur boards of education, and volunteer fire departments get a percentage as well, Echols said.

"Each school board is issued a check each month, and when there's an increase in sales tax remittances the school systems get more money, also," she said.

Please see Sales tax, page 4

Sheltered life



Animal Control Director Claudia Ray holds one of the pets housed at the county's animal shelter. In the top inlay a family of pups and a cat in photo underneath. The shelter has heated floors and is clean with no foul odors.

Morgan County Animal Control staff rescues, keeps animals safe

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

The moment you walk inside you sense a caring environment and as you stroll through your feeling is confirmed when passing the animals that let you know they're living the good life.

Eighty-five dogs and 10 cats are currently housed at the Morgan County Animal Control facility at Industrial Park in Hartselle.

The animals are kept there for adoption and their shelter area

is immaculate, without odors.

Although the dwelling place for the pooches and felines is temporary, their quality of animal life is great.

"We're very proud of our shelter," said Director Claudia Ray. "We have the adoption side, stray side and quarantine area. We have heated floors, and all of the animals have their own air exchange to prevent cross contamination. It's really nice."

The shelter has a variety of

dogs.

"We have everything from Poodles to Great Danes," Ray said. "It's exciting every day because you never know what the day will bring."

The shelter has a medical room where animals that are pregnant give birth and an area for confinement. In another room Ray and her staff bathes the animals. All of their needs are fulfilled.

Overflow animals are routinely

Please see Animals, page 4

Progress visible with Morgan bridge projects

ATRIP funding gets credit

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

For almost 20 years Morgan County officials have routinely replaced deteriorating bridges, and that practice continues with several structures currently under construction.

The county receives federal aid funds annually and most of the money is spent on bridges, according to Engineer Greg Bodley.

"The County Commission's aggressive bridge replacement program began in 1997," Bodley said. "The Amendment One GARVEE funds from the state of Alabama in 2000 accelerated these replacements."

Please see Progress, page 6

INSIDE

Chairman Ray Long delivers state of the county address, page 2

New license commissioner takes office, page 5

Sheriff takes office for second term, page 10

Work in progress in Districts 3 and 4, page 12

Chairman: County financially strong, reserve growing

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

Morgan County is in good financial condition with over \$2 million in reserve coffers. County Commission Chairman Ray Long relayed that information to 130 people while delivering his State of the County address on March 3rd at the Decatur-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce annual county breakfast. The event was held at Turner-Surles Community Center.

"Today I am proud to report to you that your county is in good shape," he said. "We are financially strong and getting better every day. During the past year we added an additional \$700,000 to our reserves bringing our balance up to \$2.8 million. Now this may not sound like much for a county our size, but when I

came into office a little over four years ago we had a zero balance. I am proud of the way our elected officials and employees have responded over the past few years when we asked them to be conservative with their spending. They have responded year after year by watching their budgets carefully."

The county's current fiscal budget is \$44 million and \$21.7 of that amount is the general fund budget.

Long said the commission is transparent with taxpayer money and urged the crowd to review financial records on the county's website.

"Every dollar that we spend is your money, and we want you to see how we are spending it," he said. "I think your elected officials and employees are doing a great job watching how your money is

spent. A good sign of that is how we have managed to start building up our reserves."

In addition to county finances, Long shared information about projects each commissioner has under way, and about changes, growth and progress in county departments.

The chairman told how he and the commissioners work cooperatively.

"These four guys who serve you on the County Commission love Morgan County," he said. "I see it every day. They work hard to satisfy every complaint or concern. Now, you and I know that is hard to do, but they have patience with our citizens. They go well beyond what is required of them. Ladies and gentlemen I am proud to serve with these four guys."



Chairman Ray Long received a standing ovation after delivering his State of the County address to a group of 130.

He said the commission has regained respect.

"Look how far we have come in the past four years," Long said. "Just a few years ago we were the laughing stock of Alabama. Today we are respected again."

Brewer and Priceville high

schools' Jr. ROTC posted colors and Long's grandchildren Ellie Blackwood and Chance Brown led the crowd in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Pastor Shane Lewis of Somerville Baptist Church gave the invocation.

In closing remarks Wade

Weaver, Vice Chairman of Public Policy for Valley Budweiser thanked all who participated in the program and he complimented Ellie and Chance: "That's the best Pledge of Allegiance ever."



Above, Chairman Ray Long's grandchildren, Chance Brown, left and Ellie Blackwood lead the audience in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Right, commissioners Greg Abercrombie, Don Stisher, Jeff Clark and Randy Vest enjoy the event.



Vest selected for 18-month program to improve county government

Morgan County District 2 Commissioner Randy Vest was chosen to be a member of an elite group of second-term county commissioners to pilot a statewide program.

Guided by the Association of County Commissions of Alabama, Vest and commissioners from 15 other counties began the Practical Leadership Action Network. The 18-

month program focuses on practical and service oriented skills that will lead to effective local leadership in communities.

The group held its first meeting in January and will meet again in August.

During the course of the program the group will look at some of the specialized functions; be actively involved

with the association's affiliate organizations/governing boards; enhance their leadership skills during instructional sessions; and visit local government operations in other counties. Also, members will get hands-on experience in Washington as advocates for the best interests of county government in Alabama.

The program will help the

entire state, according to ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield.

Compared to just a decade ago, Alabama counties are strong-



Vest

and better equipped to serve the citizens that depend on their services," Brasfield said. "Because Alabama will never be stronger than its weakest county government, every citizen has an interest in seeing our entire state improve. This program is just part of our association's efforts to move our state forward."

The program is for commissioners who began their second term of office in November 2014. Each commissioner was required to have finished the first level of the Alabama Local Government Training Institute.

ACCA comprises county commission membership of all 67 counties in the state of Alabama.

Morgan EMA keeps residents informed during severe weather

Spring the season to watch

**By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director**

As severe weather season approaches Morgan County Emergency Management Agency Director Eddie Hicks and his staff are preparing to keep residents informed about potential threats to local communities.

The main watch period is March through May when there are frequent alerts issued for tornado watches and warnings.

“Those are the worst times because you have warm and cold fronts battling it out during a season change, and we get caught up in the middle,” Hicks said. “This is the reason people need to always be prepared to deal with severe weather, and we’re here to let them know about any storm that’s headed this way.”

Located in the basement of the courthouse, EMA has an emergency operations center to accommodate 27 people, who assemble there during severe weather.

“Any time there’s a tornado watch issued we activate the operations center to coordinate response to emergency events,” said Hicks. “Included in the group are representatives for first responders such as police, fire, medical and representatives for agencies such as the Red Cross, Salvation Army and utilities. School officials are also part of the group.”

Participants gather information to share with their respective agencies.

“The knowledge they receive about the event at hand helps give them direction on how to proceed with safeguards to deal with situations facing

agencies they represent,” Hicks said.

EMA App

Last year, Hicks added an EMA app for smartphone users to access information about the weather, shelter locations, traffic, school closings and contact phone numbers. Information is included also for Browns Ferry and family emergency plans.

“This app is a valuable tool to get information about natural or man-made disasters,” Hicks said. “More people use smartphones to get information and it was really inevitable that we would develop this application. It’s working really well.”

The app is for all smartphones and may be obtained through the appropriate app



EMA Director Eddie Hicks and EMA Specialist Jacob Crowell discuss a weather screen on a monitor.

The team stays on top of the weather for the public.

store, Hicks said.

Air Products and Chemicals, Inc. recently gave Hicks a \$900 donation to pay for the county’s application service for another year.

Overall, Hicks said the app and other communication resources in the County’s

operation center give residents a variety of coverage during stormy weather.

“We don’t know what the future holds this spring, but residents can be sure that we will keep them informed on every end,” he said.

“Hopefully, we’ll have a mild

spring and summer.” The county has nine storm shelters.

The County has storm shelters for residents to go to during severe weather. Please see a list on page 4.

EMA’s Jacob Crowell completes FEMA studies

Morgan County Emergency Management Agency Specialist Jacob Crowell graduated from Federal Emergency Management

Agency’s basic academy and received certification in December.

Crowell completed five courses that totaled 167 hours of training

to graduate from the National Emergency Basic Academy.

The academy is the first phase of FEMA’s Emergency Manage-

ment Professional Program. Curriculum is designed to be a lifetime of learning for emergency managers and includes three closely related training programs.

Over a four-week period, at different times, Crowell went to the Maryland-based academy and studied these courses: Science of disaster, planning, emergency operations, exercise design and public information and warning.

The Academy is an entryway for individuals who are pursuing a career in emergency management.

Crowell, 24, said the knowledge he’s gaining through a variety of training, and EMA Director Eddie



Crowell is presented his certificate From EMA Academy Superintendent Ed Smith after completing FEMA studies.

Clean hands at a busy place

Sanitizer stations were placed at each entrance and near elevators on each floor of the courthouse for use by the public and employees. Right, EMA Specialist Brandy Davis uses one by an elevator.

“This is another way of giving back to our residents,” said Chairman Ray Long.



Please see Crowell, page 4

Animals

Continued from page 1

taken near Nashville for adoption.

"We work a lot with Rescue Group, which gives the animals their shots to prepare them for transport," Ray said.

Adoption fees for animals kept at the shelter range from \$20 to \$40.

The shelter is just one component of animal control.

"Animal control is 24/7," Ray said. "We get night calls that are limited to injured animals and dog bites, but when they have drug busts and dogs are involved we have to go out and seize the animals. Often, during the holidays when law enforcement officers make DUI arrests we have to go out and get suspects' animals."

Extremely cold weather

prompts a lot of calls, also.

"During the cold snap in January we received numerous calls about dogs that didn't have shelter, so we made a lot of runs to get them out of the weather," she said.

Built four years ago, the shelter is next to the county's environmental services building, which was constructed at the same time.

The department provides service for municipalities in the county, including Hartselle, which pays a fee to the county. Decatur has its own animal control division.

"We are proud of this facility and all of our county buildings," said County Commission Chairman Ray Long. "Animal control provides a valuable service to the residents of Morgan County and

the shelter is second to none in the area."

District 3 Commissioner Don Stisher said he watched animal control grow throughout the years.

"This is an invaluable service that we are pleased to have under our umbrella of services for our residents," Stisher said.

Meanwhile, Ray says the animals look forward to the arrival of spring.

"We keep it real clean and they love being inside, but we also have a fenced area where they go outside and play, and they love it, too. "They are a little antsy when it's cold because they can't go outside and play, so they'll be glad to feel warmer temperatures.

They're no different from people. They love nice weather."



The cats' living quarters.



The dogs live here

Morgan County storm shelters

Danville Volunteer Fire Dept.

5798 Highway 36 West
Danville, AL

Two shelters, 98 capacity each

Somerville Community Shelter

192 Broad St.

Somerville, AL

One shelter, 98 capacity

Punkin Center Volunteer Fire Dept.

116 Kirby Bridge Road
Danville, AL

One shelter, capacity 98

Cotaco Volunteer Fire Dept.

8384 Highway 36 East

Somerville, AL

One shelter, capacity 150

Morgan County Courthouse

302 Lee St. NE

Decatur, AL

Basement opens in severe weather

Decatur City Hall

402 Lee St. NE

Decatur, AL

Basement opens in severe weather

Trinity Town Hall

35 Preston Drive

Trinity, AL

Two shelters, 98 capacity each

Massey Volunteer Fire Dept.

386 Evergreen Road

Danville, AL

One shelter, capacity 98

Somerville Community Shelter

72 Cross Creek Loop

Somerville, AL

One shelter, capacity 98

Crowell

Continued from page 3

Hicks is priceless.

"I absolutely love it," Crowell said. "I love working for Eddie. He's the best boss I could ask for and I wouldn't change anything. My studies and training are really beneficial for my work."

A graduate of the University of North Alabama, Crowell

will complete his first year with Morgan EMA later this month and Hicks said he's quite pleased with his work.

"He's a quick learner, and he's trying to avail himself of all the knowledge he can to become a better emergency manager," said Hicks.

As an EMA planning and operations specialist Crowell must complete numerous

training programs through FEMA as well as other agencies to receive certification in various areas.

In addition to the federal certification he earned, Crowell is nearing state certification through the Alabama Association of Emergency Managers.

"Education and training are valuable," Hicks said.

Sales tax

Continued from page 1

Decatur Board of Education had an 11.89% increase in 2014; Hartselle, 14.12%, and Morgan County, 14.90% from the two-cent sales tax and 14.39% from the one-cent sales tax.

Total amounts each school board received in 2014 are as follows: Decatur, \$6,663,719.61; Hartselle, \$2,459,603.96; and Morgan County received \$6,203,856.25 from the coun-

ty's one-cent sales tax and \$3,028,389.94 from the two-cent sales tax. Morgan County Volunteer Fire Departments received \$336,487.78 last year.

The county saw the highest increases in February, March, May, June September and December, Echols said. The total collection for those months was \$9.3 million.

County commissioners are pleased with the increase.

"The increase makes us all happy, especially our school

systems," said Chairman Ray Long. "We are also proud of our businesses and industries that pay the taxes, and we hope they continue to prosper as well."

"Sales tax benefits our school systems and our volunteer fire departments to a degree," said District 3 Commissioner Don Stisher. We are elated that we had such a large increase last year and we applaud Michelle and her staff for doing a great job with sales tax collections."

Maxwell begins six-year term as new license commissioner

Sharon Maxwell took office on Jan. 15th in the County Commission meeting chambers at the courthouse. She was surrounded by family and a large group of friends.

Her husband Johnny offered a Bible scripture reading and prayer before the swearing-in ceremony.

Maxwell's granddaughter Ella Grace held the Bible as District Court Judge Charles Langham administered the oath of office to her. Her daughter April and son Trevor stood with her, also.

County Commission Chairman Ray Long told a full room that he's known the Maxwells for years, and Sharon will be a great public official.

After the ceremony a reception was held where Maxwell provided refreshments for those who attended. During that time officials and employees came to wish Maxwell well in her new position.

As license commissioner Maxwell is responsible for the main office at the courthouse and two satellite offices, one at the District 4 shop and one at Hartselle. The offices issue tags, driver's license and recreational licenses including hunting and fishing.

Maxwell worked as a clerk and supervisor in the office prior to being elected in November. She replaces long-time License Commissioner Sue Baker Roan, who decided to retire after holding the office for 20 years.

The license commissioner serves a six-year term before another election is held.



District Court Judge Charles Langham administers oath of office to Maxwell as her granddaughter, Ella Grace holds the Bible.



Chairman Ray Long welcomes Maxwell to the courthouse.



Maxwell surrounded by her family: left, granddaughter, Ella Grace, Maxwell's husband, Johnny, daughter April and son, Trevor.



Left, a large crowd wished Maxwell well. Right, from left, Clay Marlow, District 3 Commissioner Don Stisher, Maxwell and District 4 Commissioner Greg Abercrombie.

Progress

Continued from page 1

Known as the Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicle program, GARVEE bonds are used for roads and bridges that are prioritized by urgent need.

The Alabama Transportation Rehabilitation and Improvement Program (ATRIP) is an extension of GRAVEE, and in 2012 Morgan County received \$11.9 million of a \$19.1 million allotment shared with municipalities in the county. Decatur's portion was \$6.4, Trinity, \$448,000, and Priceville, \$320,000.

"The size of the ATRIP funding has allowed for replacement of several large structures that would have taken the county many years to save for," Bodley said.

To date, 38 bridges throughout the county's four districts have been replaced and others are under construction.

"The bridge on Danville Road over the west fork of Flint Creek is currently under construction and expected to be finished this summer," Bodley said.

The replacement of the bridge over Kidd Creek on Rescue Road began last month, and other bridge projects are planned.

"The plans for two large bridges, one on Kirby Bridge Road in districts 1 and 2, and one on Vaughn Bridge Road in District 2 are nearing completion," Bodley said. "Construction of both of these projects should begin later this year."

In addition, planning is in preliminary stages for two bridge replacements on Cotaco-Florette Road in District 4 and Cedar Creek Church Road in District 3.

County Commission members are pleased with the ongoing progress.

"For years, Morgan County has been a model statewide in many areas of progressiveness," said District 3 Commissioner Don Stisher. "Our roads and bridges are second to none, and our county is one that all residents can proudly call home."

District 4 Commissioner Greg Abercrombie said recent growth of facilities in the county adds to the progress.

"There was a great need in the county for people to have more gathering places such as senior citizen centers, and we needed more recreation facilities," said Abercrombie. "We're headed in that direction in all districts, and I am extremely proud of our roads and bridges as well as our facilities."

BRIDGE DATA

Morgan County has 118 bridges/culverts that are 20 feet or more in length on county roads. The County Commission is responsible for construction and maintenance of the structures. Currently, there are 24 weight restricted bridges including six for school buses. Four of the bridges will be replaced with ATRIP funds. The number of restricted bridges is significantly lower than in the late 1990s. Below is a comparison:

Status of Bridges in 1997	Status of Bridges in 2015
62 total weight Restricted Bridges.	24 Weight Restricted Bridges. Will be reduced to 20 after ATRIP.
30 weight restricted for school bus.	6 weight restricted for school bus. Will be reduced to 5 after ATRIP. Remaining structures are located on very low volume roads not presently being on a school bus route.
Approx. 70% of all structures were Structurally Deficient or Functionally Obsolete.	Approx. 20% of all structures are Structurally Deficient or Functionally Obsolete. Will be reduced to 14% after ATRIP.
Approx. 40% were Structurally Deficient.	Approx. 10% are Structurally Deficient. Will be reduced to 5% after ATRIP. Remaining structures are located on very low volume roads.

Rx cards still available

The Morgan County Commission still has free Rx discount cards for county residents. Collectively, the cards have resulted in more than \$200,000 in savings for people who have used them.

To get your card please go to our website: www.co.morgan.al.us and click on Coast to Coast to request one. We will mail it to you. There are no eligibility requirements.

MORGAN BRIDGE PROJECTS 1997-2014

Location	Project Desc.	Funding	Cost	Completed
Cedar Creek Road	Design Phase	ATRIP	\$ 900,000.00	Design Phase
Cotaco-Florette Road	Design Phase	ATRIP	\$ 1,500,000.00	Design Phase
Rescue Road	CT 12' X 6'	ATRIP	\$ 339,892.84	Under Const.
Danville Rd Means Br	320 ft AASHTO	ATRIP	\$ 2,942,630.57	Under Const.
Kirby Bridge Rd	BT63/ AASHTO	ATRIP	\$ 2,800,000.00	1/1/2015
Vaughn Bridge Rd.	BT54/AASHTO	ATRIP	\$ 2,800,000.00	1/1/2015
Wilhite Rd Railroad	240 ft AASHTO	ATRIP	\$ 962,025.71	7/9/2014
West Lacon Rd	CQ 14' X 12'	Federal	\$ 356,186.45	10/4/2013
Gum Springs Rd.	CT 12' X 8'	Federal	\$ 374,290.11	5/1/2013
Hwy 55 West BR#58	CQ 14' X 9'	Federal	\$ 243,123.93	4/17/2012
Wilhite Rd	CQ 16' X 14'	Federal	\$ 349,019.22	11/14/2011
Gandys Cove Rd	CQ 12' X 10'	Federal	\$ 388,992.16	6/9/2011
Neel School Rd.	CD 12' X 10'	Federal	\$ 207,634.39	12/2/2010
Hwy 55 West	CT 10' X 8'	Federal	\$ 363,389.12	5/1/2009
Keller Hollow Rd	CT 12' X 8'	Federal	\$ 496,290.42	9/12/2007
Pleasant Valley Rd	CT 10' X 5'	Federal	\$ 359,097.60	8/28/2007
Upper River Rd	420 ft AASHTO	Gar & Fed	\$ 1,770,553.10	12/7/2006
Natural Bridge Rd.	CQ 10' X 6'	Garvee	\$ 261,279.64	5/10/2005
Upper River Rd.	CT 8' X 8'	Federal	\$ 203,848.35	4/13/2005
Holmes Drake Rd.	CQ 16' X 12'	Garvee	\$ 510,718.48	11/9/2004
Rural Grove Rd.	CQ 10' X 6'	State	\$ 123,187.81	8/17/2004
Holmes Rd.	CD 14' X 12'	Garvee	\$ 365,247.12	7/27/2004
Indian Hills Rd.	CQ 14' X 9'	Federal	\$ 266,197.60	3/12/2004
Apple Grove Rd.	CT 10' X 10'	Garvee	\$ 156,780.59	3/12/2004
New Cut Rd.	5 span precast	Garvee	\$ 460,270.90	11/13/2003
Old Trinity Rd.	4 span precast	State	\$ 360,023.95	11/11/2003
Mt. Tabor Rd.	CT 12' X 7'	Federal	\$ 181,581.97	7/11/2003
East Lacon Rd.	CT 12' X 5'	Federal	\$ 105,508.17	7/11/2003
Gum Pond Rd.	6 barrel 12' X 12'	Garvee	\$ 392,425.48	7/11/2003
Thompson Rd.	4 span precast	Federal	\$ 375,934.50	10/8/2002
Gandys Cove Rd.	CD 12' X 5'	Garvee	\$ 117,658.83	6/20/2002
Lawrence Cove Rd.	CT 14' X 7'	Garvee	\$ 149,846.85	6/4/2002
Cotaco-Florette	7 span precast	Federal	\$ 575,061.81	1/17/2002
Old Moulton Rd.	CQ 14' X 10'	Federal	\$ 258,494.00	11/6/2001
Rock Creek Rd.	CD 12' X 10'	Federal	\$ 540,949.76	11/6/2001
Cotaco-Florette	5 span precast	Federal	\$ 416,604.61	5/29/2001
Ironman Rd.	6 span precast	Federal	\$ 371,637.41	12/13/2000
Norris Mill Rd	4 span precast	Federal	\$ 333,283.12	5/19/2000
Crow Bridge	Two 5 span	Federal	\$ 490,519.60	11/4/1999
Danville Rd.	CT 10' X 6'	Federal	\$ 100,775.60	3/26/1999
		TOTAL COST	\$ 24,270,961.77	

SOURCE: Morgan County Engineer Greg Bodley

Honor for 50 years

Morris Anderson receives Distinguished Service award

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

Morris Anderson knew something was going on based on secretive phone calls to his home, but he didn't have a clue about what would happen in coming weeks.

"I knew there was a fly in the buttermilk because phone calls were being made and received," Anderson said. "JoAnn (his wife) would get a call and leave the room."

He pieced it all together after they arrived for a conference of the Alabama Court Reporters Association where he received the Distinguished Service Award for his 50

years of court reporting. The conference was Jan. 22 -24 in Birmingham.

"I served as president of the association and on the Board of Directors years ago, but never dreamed of anything like this ever coming," Anderson said.

Prior to receiving the award there were other clues that made him curious.

"When JoAnn and I got down there that day we were about to eat from the buffet they had spread and in came my family, my sons and their families, and my sister was there, too. I knew something was up for sure."

He wasn't just called up to receive the award. The association made a huge presentation that included a video with pre-recorded testimonials about Anderson from people who know and work with him in the Morgan County judicial system.

"They were speaking from the courthouse and I noticed some tears were being wiped away," he said.

The father of District Attorney Scott Anderson, Morris is court reporter to Circuit Court Judge Jennifer Howell. His career dates

Please see Award, page 13



Morris Anderson shows Distinguished Service Award he received for 50 years of court reporting in Morgan County Circuit Court.

Morgan hosts gathering for county, state leaders

The Morgan County Commission hosted the second annual legislative gathering of leaders from throughout North Alabama on Feb. 18th at the courthouse.

The group comprised county commissioners, revenue and license commissioners, sheriffs, state legislators and others who work in county government.

Chairman Ray Long presided over the 2015 Legislative Issues for Alabama Counties and offered an opportunity for officials from each county to speak.

Cullman County Revenue Commissioner Barry Willingham said his office is one with the dual responsibility of issuing tags, and he is concerned about deferred ad valorem tax for certain vehicles. He presented scenarios about how that could make counties lose tax dollars. For instance, if a person bought a vehicle and left the state, the ad valorem tax would not be paid because it would've been due the following year.

Sen. Arthur Orr said he has presented legislation to reverse the deferred tax method.

Willingham said he is also concerned about property taxes on Section 42 homes. The Association of County Commissions of Alabama worked vigorously to defeat legislation in 2014 that would have given owners of such properties total

tax exemption.

Sheriff Ana Franklin was vocal about prison reform and pistol permits, saying that proposed legislation for both would have negative effects.

Franklin said prison reform could mean requiring county jails to house some inmates up to three years.

"Prison reform is a huge deal for us," she

said. "We've been under a federal court decree for several years to keep our jail from becoming overcrowded. We are trying to stay on top of situations to keep us out a federal lawsuit and deal with the Department of Corrections at the same time. A Class-D felony would allow inmates to stay in county jails up to three years and that would be devastating for us. And, we are

not trained or equipped to deal with felony convictions."

Please see meeting, page 13



Morgan County Commissioners talk with colleagues from throughout North Alabama during a legislative meeting on Feb. 18th at the courthouse.

About

The Voice of Morgan County

The Voice of Morgan County is published quarterly and mailed to 40,000 homes. It is a product of the County Commission and no portion of it may be re-produced. This is the second edition of the third volume.

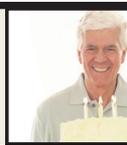
The publication is produced solely by Communications/Community Relations Director Sheryl Marsh.

Please be sure to view community videos on our website by going to www.co.morgan.al.us There, click on county departments, then select Communications/Community Relations and click on multimedia.





Senior Living



Enjoying life every day

At the Neel Senior Citizen Center

**By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director**

A former rocket scientist recalls some of his major achievements while playing a card game with a group of ladies.

Across from them is a nice lady sitting alone coloring pages in a "Hello Kitty" book. Several card games and dialogue are going on at other tables.

Everybody is doing something.

This was the scene on a chilly day in January at the Neel Senior Center where 17 senior citizens gathered for fun, games and food.

Proudly wearing his Alabama (Tide) cap, Herschel Martin, 90, a Vietnam War veteran and retired NASA scientist leaned back and shared a tidbit about his career as a NASA scientist.

"For the last 17 years of my 31 ½ years of employment I trained astronauts and I built the back packs they wore," Martin said. "I won a lot of awards for my work."

Martin is one of four seniors age 90 or over at the center. Others range from 78 to 86.

One of the card players at Martin's table, Mae Sue Wallace, 90, was asked where did she get the fountain of youth, and she answered: "From God I reckon. He's taking care of me." She smiled and took another sip of her green tea.

Across from their table is Hazel Orr, 85. She selects one crayon after another to color pictures in a "Hello Kitty" book.

"I just like to color. I always did," she said.

At a table across from Orr, there were ladies who recalled the history of the Neel center prior to its current facility that was built in 2011 on Danville Road.

"This was the location of the first Neel center," said Ruth Wallace, 83. "The old 'Cafeteria' that John Wayne Franklin ran was here first. Then, when it closed we came to the Cafeteria building. When it got in such bad shape they moved us to the old Neel School lunchroom, then they brought us back here once this one was built."

Center Director Samantha Burgess interacts with the group and said about 20 usually go there daily.

"They have a lot of fun and they are very active," Burgess said.

Most of the seniors are widows or widowers, and shared similar reasons for going to the center:

"I just like to come down here to be with somebody," said Herman Oden, 86.

"Just to get out from home and be with peo-



Above, MCATS/Commission on Aging Director (standing) addresses senior citizens who participate in activities at the Neel Senior Center. Below, left, Mae Sue Wallace stands behind former NASA Scientist Herschel Martin; and right, Hazel Orr colors pictures in a book. Wallace and Martin are both 90 and Orr is 85.



Neel seniors

Continued from page 8

ple,” echoed Dorothy Lake, 91. “I like the trips and going out to eat,” said Katie Kirby, 78. Martin said he enjoys the people, games, and cutting a step or two. “I used to be quite a dancer and I won a lot of contests,” he chuckled. Orr likes interacting with the people and picking a “play fight”

every once and a while, but her favorite thing is “coloring”. The atmosphere at the Neel center was upbeat with a group of senior citizens who appeared to be defying age. The center opens from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m., and when they leave they will have had a hot lunch. Their meal on that day was chili, rice, rutabaga, and chocolate cake for desert

Chairman Long elected to lead Tenn. Valley Youth Services Board

Morgan County Commission Chairman Ray Long now wears another hat of leadership after being elected to serve as chairman of the Tennessee Valley Youth Services II, Inc. Board of Directors. Long presides over TVYS Board meetings that are held in Tusculumbia. Among other services, TVYS provides a detention center for juveniles after county judges place

them there for confinement. Officials must pay for bed space for juveniles from their respective counties. “I’m glad to serve on this board. It’s another way of serving the people of this county and other counties,” Long said. The TVYS chairman’s term is one year.



Long



Senior citizens divide into groups to play various card games each day. They also enjoy other activities, especially on holidays like Easter. Most of the seniors at the Neel center are widows or widowers and say they come to the center for fellowship with others, and to enjoy a nutritious meal.

Sponsor of this publication

For nearly 50 years, BP Decatur has played a vital role in the Morgan County business community.



One of the many ways BP Decatur employees support the community is by participating in the Decatur Morgan Hospital Foundation Dragonboat Races. 2014 will be our third year of competition.

One Team, One Dream!

1401 Finley Island Rd.
Decatur, AL
256-340-5200

Find your career at
www.bp.com/careers

Sheriff takes oath, swears in deputies for another 4-year term

*Family, friends
gather to express
best wishes*



Above, Circuit Judge Jennifer Howell administers the oath of office to Sheriff Ana Franklin while her daughters, Alyssa and Erika hold Bibles. Below, Franklin administers law enforcement oaths to her deputies, and the inlay photo shows Mike Corley being sworn in as chief deputy again. The event was held at Ingalls Harbor on Jan. 25th.

Morgan County Sheriff Ana took the oath of office for a second term on Jan. 25 at Ingalls Harbor.

Her daughters Alyssa and Erika held the Bibles as Circuit Judge Jennifer Howell administered the oath to Franklin.

Franklin made history when she became the county's first female sheriff after winning election in 2010.

The sheriff has been successful in fighting illegal drugs throughout the county, which was one of the promises she made during her first campaign.

Also, she has added numerous programs to aid in rehabilitating jail inmates, and she is involved in the community, spearheading charitable services for organizations like HOPE Place.

She gave new life to the sheriff's rodeo with much focus on the Special Needs Rodeo, which caters to hundreds of children.

In addition to her taking the oath, Franklin swore in all of her deputies.

Sheriff gives merit awards at banquet

Morgan County Sheriff Ana Franklin honored several of her staff members and deputies during an appreciation and awards ceremony on Jan. 13.

The sheriff gave the Award of Merit to employees who saved the life of another person at some point during their career.

The ceremony was held at the Elk's Lodge and the sheriff plans to make it an annual event.

Recipients of the award were: Detention Deputy Matt Hockett, Detention Deputy Juanita Walker Dean, Deputy Frank Anderson and Sgt. Chad Smith, Detention Deputy James Slager, Detention Deputy Jeffrey Tidwell, Detention Deputy Jarvis Moore, Detention Deputy Bo Leeth, Sgt. Chris Price, Deputy Charles Porter, Detention Deputy Tyler Berry and Sgt. Mike Wilson.

Please see Merit, page 11



Merit

Continued from page 10



Sheriff Ana Franklin and Chief Deputy Mike Corley presented merit awards to these officers.

The sheriff also presented the Almon-Biles Award to law enforcement officers who put their lives at risk by saving others in the line of duty. The recipients of that award were: State Trooper Joe McDonald, Lieut. Robert “Bones” Wilson and Special Agent Mike McCoy. Not pictured is DEA Agent Jim England, a former member of the sheriff’s staff.

Sheriff honored

Franklin, who received the Humanitarian Award from the PCA National Rodeo Association, said she appreciates her staff and was glad to award them for their service.

“I am so proud of all the sheriff’s office staff and all the community volunteers who help make this special day happen each year,” she said of her annual rodeo. “The proceeds from the rodeo allow us to supplement the cost of equipment and supplies for the office, but it also allows us to help local charities each year and to provide the Special Needs Rodeo to over 1,000 special people each year. The PCA Board and rodeo committees throughout the southeast recognize Morgan County as the wonderful place it is. It makes me proud to be your sheriff. Winning the Humanitarian Award for the second year is such an honor.”

Franklin received the award in January in Biloxi, Miss. during a PCA national event.

The sheriff says she plans to assist with PCA’s efforts to help others begin Special Needs rodeos.

“Therefore, this can be done for as many

challenged people as possible throughout the PCA organization,” Franklin said. “It would even be a greater blessing to see next year’s Humanitarian Award go to another organiza-

tion that we help. I am also grateful to all of our sponsors for their support each year.”



Almon-Biles Award recipients

Sheriff Ana Franklin and Chief Deputy Mike Corley presented the Almon-Biles Award to these law enforcement officers: From left, Corley, State Trooper Joe McDonald, Drug Task Force chief, Lt. Robert Wilson, Special Agent Mike McCoy and Franklin. Not pictured is DEA agent Jim England.



Sheriff receives Humanitarian Award

Sheriff Ana Franklin received the Humanitarian Award from the PCA National Rodeo Association. From left, Jail Administrator Larry Berzett, Harleen Reynolds, Cindy Crowell, Franklin, and rodeo organizers Bo Campbell and Clint Allemand. Franklin received the award in Biloxi, Miss. at a PCA National Final Rodeos event in January.

Commissioners report

Winter doesn't halt projects in districts

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

Despite periodic arctic blasts, that sometimes brought snow and ice, Morgan County commissioners kept projects going during the winter.

District 3 Commissioner Don Stisher and his staff have several projects under way. "Currently we are working at Falkville High School with major improvements on cam-

pus buildings, parking lots, drainage and athletic fields," Stisher said. "Along with all of that and winter preparation, we still managed to perform our routine maintenance of roads and bridges as well as other projects. We've also been patching a lot of potholes, and we are working on a couple of roads that have failed due to traffic and weather. We will prep them for new chip seal."

District 4 Commissioner Greg Abercrombie has several projects in progress in his district, including replacement of the bridge on Rescue Road.

"They've taken out the bridge, which they'll replace with a culvert and we look forward to that being completed," Abercrombie said. "We're thankful for ATRIP funding to be able to do this replacement.



Clark



Vest

sion facility has been finished. We also have done the demolition for the new senior center at Lacey's Spring. We're doing all of this in addition to regular routine road maintenance."

The project began in February and depending on weather conditions it could take 120 days to complete.

Districts 1 and 2 have kept busy with multiple projects

while performing routine maintenance as well.

"It's our goal to keep our roads and facilities in the best condition we possibly can," said District 1 Commissioner Jeff Clark.

District 2 Commissioner Randy Vest echoed Clark: "Our priority is to serve the people and in doing that we strive to do projects to improve their quality of life."

Work in District 3



Dist. 3 Commissioner
Don Stisher



Left, a drainage improvement project on Highway 55 West to prevent flooding during heavy rain. Right, the district paved and striped two miles of West Lacon Road. The project was finished in January.

Work in District 4



Dist. 4 Commissioner
Abercrombie



Left, a company installed lights at Brindlee Mountain Ball Park last month. Right, the concession building is finished. The park could be open by the end of Spring.

Meeting

Continued from page 7

In addition, Franklin said a proposed bill that would allow handguns in vehicles without a pistol permit poses a threat to society.

“You do away with the permit, you do away with background checks,” Franklin said. “This is a lot bigger than losing \$20 per pistol permit.”

ACCA has vowed to defend counties’ interest in legislation that could yield negative results.

To get the meeting started Long introduced a list of ACCA bills, which included prison reform and pistol permits, and the organization’s position on each piece of legislation.

The chairman said the meeting was purposeful, and he urged unity among the officials.

“We like working together,” Long said. “It benefits all of us, and we can all work together for the betterment of Alabama.”

Award

Continued from page 7

to 1964 when he became court reporter for former Circuit Judge James N. Bloodworth. Subsequently, he worked for former judges Richard Hundley and Sherrie Paler, and now Howell.

Also, during his career Morris served a four-year term as Representative of District 8 in the state Legislature in

1994.

In addition to Scott Anderson and his family, Morris’ son Stan Anderson and his family attended the ceremony as well.

Morris’ wife, JoAnn stood with him when he received the award.

State Sen. Arthur Orr was keynote speaker for the event. Morris doesn’t have immediate plans to retire.

Morgan County American Legion
Post 15 Sponsor of this publication



The American Legion was chartered by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic veterans organization

focusing on service to veterans, service members and communities.



allegionpost15.com
facebook.com/allegionpost15

2607 Highway 31 S, Decatur, AL 35603

PH: (256) 353-5501

JOIN THE LEGION IN SUPPORTING VETERANS AND COMMUNITY



American Legion Auxiliary

- World’s largest women’s patriotic service organization.



Sons of The American Legion

- Males of eligible parents or grandparents.



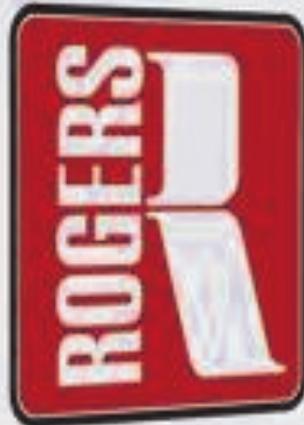
American Legion Riders

- Supporting schools, veterans, and service members.

-Meetings 7 PM – The 4th Monday Of Each Month
(Except 2nd Monday in May & December)

-Dancing Every Friday
Live Band and Dance Starts at 7 PM.

-BINGO Every Saturday
Guaranteed Thousands in Prizes Each Week.
Cards Go On Sale at 5 PM - Play Starts at 6 PM.



ROGERS GROUP INC.

Building better communities from the ground up

Sponsor of this publication

PACT fundraiser Touch-a-Truck helps prevent child abuse locally

Sponsors needed for April 25th event at fairgrounds

Children in Morgan County need your help!

Authorities say 371 child abuse reports involving 577 children were filed last year in this county, and Parents and Children Together (PACT) along with supporting agencies are working to help prevent the abuse.

If this moves you, please consider joining PACT and others for its second, annual Touch-A-Truck on April 25th at the Morgan County Fairgrounds from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m.

The first event was held last year

thanks to sponsors.

Touch-A-Truck gives children an opportunity to interact with first responders like firefighters, law enforcement officers, ambulance personnel, and government officials as well as caring civilians, who are concerned about their needs. At the event they will be able to play, climb, explore and touch the trucks at the event. Vehicles will include construction trucks/equipment, utility trucks, tractors, 18-wheelers and buses.

In addition, the event will include a presentation on child car seat checks,

child identification and fire safety tips.

The event raises money to help prevent child abuse and strengthen families in Morgan County.

Last year was the first time for the event and 1,500 people attended.

PACT anticipates attendance of 2,000 to 3,000 this year.

Johnny Coker, vice president of the PACT Board of Directors said the event replaced the organization's annual Family Fun Day.

Please see PACT, page 16



Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) Lodge #46 representatives, Morgan Deputy Don Carr, left, and Decatur Police Officer Al Ballesteros, right, present a check to Parents and Children Living Together Director Susan Roberts to support Touch-A-Truck.

EMA provides CAMEO training

Local and area emergency responders reached another level in learning how to deal with hazardous events through an upgraded Introduction to Computer Aided Management of Emergency Operations class in the EMA auditorium in January.

The three-day class was taught by Earl Gorrondona of LSU National Center for Biological Research.

Gorrondona said the purpose of the class was to prepare emergency responders to deal with all hazardous events such as chemical spills, tornadoes and hurricanes. In addition to the local EMA staff, Decatur firefighters and emergency responders from Marshall, Blount and Lauderdale counties attended the class. Participants were to receive certification upon completing an examination.

Using the CAMEO computer software, responders would be able to track location as well as other pertinent details, Gorrondona said. The class was free and EMA Director Eddie Hicks said the training will be beneficial for all who attended.



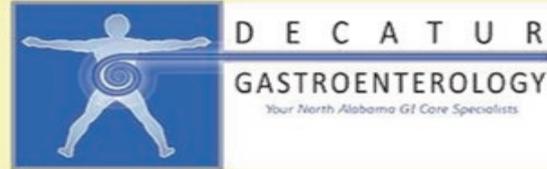
This group of participants includes Decatur firefighters, EMA specialists, and other first responders and officials from surrounding counties.



Bridge out

District 4 Commissioner Greg Abercrombie looks over area where the bridge is being replaced on Rescue Road.

Sponsor of this publication



BHIP

Believe Health Is Possible

Dr. Jeanette Keith, M.D.

Decatur Gastroenterology Associates

1103 15th Avenue, SE
Decatur, AL 35601
P. 256.350.0153
F. 256.350.0156

www.bhip.us.com

BHIP. Be Healthy. Live Well

Accepting new patients



Halo Sleepsac
NEWBORN SWADDLE

Keeps baby perfectly swaddled and safe on its back.



Panda Warmer

Provides the most advanced care while keeping little ones warm.

Sponsor of this publication

babies
sleep
safe



The Newborn center

We encourage you to schedule a tour and meet our staff
256.341.3400

 **Decatur Morgan Hospital**

DECATUR GENERAL CAMPUS
www.decaturmorganhospital.net





Celebrating 30 years

Morgan County Circuit Clerk Chris Priest and his staff surprised District Court Specialist/Magistrate Cecil Cole with a celebration in January for his 30th anniversary. Cole said he had forgotten the occasion, so, “They really surprised me,” he said. Priest presented Cole with the service plaque from the state he is holding, and a 30-year service pin he wore. Priest said Cole has done outstanding work in the office for years, and deserves to be honored for it.



PACT

Continued from page 14

“This is what we’ll be doing from now on,” said Coker. “Basically, it is the only fundraiser we specifically do. We receive grants and donations from other organizations such as Kiwanis, and United Way, but this is our sole fundraiser.”

There is no admission charge to attend the event.

“The fundraising comes from the generosity of folks who display their vehicles at the event,” Coker said.

So far, these entities have agreed to be sponsors: Morgan County Commission, Decatur Fire and Rescue, Morgan County Extension Service, Decatur Utilities, Salvation Army and Decatur City Schools.

To become a sponsor you may call Coker at: 256-616-6607 or PACT Director Susan Roberts at: 256-355-7252.

“You can help us make a huge difference in the lives of children,” Coker said. “These children need us and they need you.”

Spring
cleanup



The Morgan County Commission will schedule its annual Spring Cleanup Week soon. This is a time residents will be able to take unwanted items like furniture and appliances to a county shop or the landfill for disposal at no cost.

Please look for the dates on the county’s Facebook page beginning the first week in April.

Sponsor of this publication



Branch Locations

211 Lee St. NE

1830 Modaus Road SW

1309 Stratford Road SE

BANK