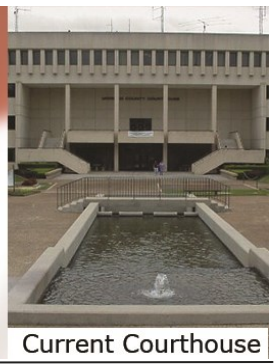
First Courthouse

THE VOICE OF MORGAN COUNTY

Keeping you informed / Telling untold stories


Current Courthouse

MORGAN COUNTY COMMISSION September 2013 VOLUME 1, NO. 4

Morgan placed in positive light with unanimous election of County Commission Chairman Ray Long as ACCA Vice President

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

When Ray Long became Chairman of the Morgan County Commission in November 2010 he brought a positive attitude and innovative ideas to the office.

He said one of his main objectives was for the county to prosper and have a favorable reputation throughout the state and country.

Just completing the third year of his first term, Long is achieving his goals at a swift pace. His recent election as Vice President of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama makes it clear that he has gained the respect of other officials throughout the state.

Chairman Long

In August, during an annual conference a nominating committee chose Long as the nominee and the ACCA membership unanimously elected him to the post which postures him to become president of the Organization in 2015. The membership comprises all of the state's 67 counties.

ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield explained that first and second vice presidents are elected during the conference each year, and each moves up to president in subsequent years.

He said Long is qualified for the position.

"The president's primary responsibility is leading and

Please see Long, page 15

Chief Deputy Corley decided law enforcement career as child chasing siblings on bike

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

As a young child Mike Corley would get on his bicycle, mimic siren sounds with his mouth and chase his siblings.

"I have two sisters and a brother and I can remember chasing them on my bike like they were the bad guys and I was after them," he chuckled.

The siblings chase was the first sign of the career path he would take.

While in high school he volunteered to work with an ambulance service and rode along with Cullman police.

While completing a term with the U.S. Army, he would get weekend passes to go home and volunteer with the Cullman County Sheriff's Department.

Chief Deputy Mike Corley

Today, 41 years into his career he holds the second highest county law enforcement position as chief deputy to Morgan County Sheriff Ana Frank-

Please see chief, page 4

District Attorney offers second chance to first offenders charged with minor crimes

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

Morgan County District Attorney Scott Anderson is willing to give individuals charged with minor crimes a second chance to get back on the right side of the law.

To make that offer Anderson implemented the Pretrial Intervention Program on Aug. 1.

He chose Becky Bearden, an employee in his office since 2011, for director of the program, which will initially accept defendants charged with misdemeanor offenses only.

Anderson

"It is designed for first offenders who have made a mistake and could benefit from us putting some structure in their lives, and making sure they are responsible for their action," Anderson said.

"Once they are successful in the program we will dismiss the charges and get them back to being productive citizens."

The program is currently in district court, but will extend to circuit court at some point and certain felony cases will be considered. Defendants in Class-A felony cases such as murder and robbery, as well as others will not be eligible to apply.

Victims would play a key role in whether an offender is accepted into the program.

Please see pre-trial, page 7

Inside

A new Danville Road, page 10

Morgan, Decatur approve contract for new jail annex, page 12

Hartselle senior citizens enjoy a variety of activities, pages 8, 9

Circuit clerk's office has flawless audit, page 6

Morgan hosts annual health fair at courthouse in August

Morgan County employees participated in an annual health fair last month where several were winners of door prizes and other items provided by various vendors.

Throughout the day employees from county offices and offsite locations went to the basement to talk with representatives from numerous companies and organizations like LIFESouth Community Blood Centers.

"This is fantastic," said Tamara Watts, a district community development coordinator for LIFESouth. "There is great participation."

Chief Administrator Belinda Ealey and Human Resources/ Benefits Officer Marsha Keeney organized the health fair. Professionals were available to do vision and spinal screenings. Employees from the County Commission office rotated serving refreshments to the crowd.

An AFLAC duck was a coveted prize and so was a high definition TV.

At the end of the day a drawing was held for those items as well as others.

Like in anything, some won and some did not.

But, it appeared that all enjoyed the fair and said they looked forward to next year.

Morgan employees stopped by the various vendors' tables and in doing so they received gifts from the businesses and organizations.

Morgan EMA passes in all areas of FEMA emergency operations drill evaluation

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

Practice before testing resulted in Morgan County Emergency Management Agency passing a detailed evaluation conducted by Federal Emergency Management Agency in June.

"Every two years the six counties around the Nuclear plant (Browns Ferry) undergo a FEMA evaluation for which they're graded in various areas including traffic control, population evacuation, warnings and public messaging," said EMA Director Eddie Hicks.

First responders and officials practiced for the drill in May.

"It paid off, said Hicks. When we were evaluated in June we had 40 people to simulate an emergency operation and we passed in every area on which we were graded."

TVA Emergency Planner DeDe Hayes broadcasts a test message for tone alert radio system to various agencies, including school systems and nursing homes.

Hicks explained that the operations command center in the courthouse basement has 27 stations, but more people were needed to simulate a 24-hour emergency. They would rotate manning the stations during a mock emergency situation.

Tennessee Valley Authority Emergency Planner DeDe Hayes said FEMA officials interviewed Decatur Police Department authorities regarding traffic control, which they handle during emergencies.

"They did extremely well on that," Hayes said.

Another part of the evaluation involved special needs population for residents who are bed-ridden, in Hospice care or who have other limiting conditions. Hayes said arrangements would be made to move them by ambulance or Morgan County Area Transportation System (MCATS) during an emergency.

She said 150 people are currently registered in the special needs population of the county. Hayes said registration cards are inside calendars that TVA distributes annually.

The drill lasted several hours. Federal officials from Atlanta did the evaluation.

Participants in the drill included decision makers from agencies that would respond to emergencies. The agencies included law enforcement, fire and rescue, medical and volunteer organizations like the Red Cross and Salvation Army. County government officials participated in the drill, also.

The next FEMA evaluation will be in 2015.

Hicks said he is pleased with the outcome of the testing.

"I thought everybody did extremely well," Hicks said. "I am also proud that we have dedicated people working in the various agencies because that makes everything come together in times of emergencies as well as when we're being graded. Everything went as planned."

Parks and Recreation employee retires after 34 years of service

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

"You are going to miss me when I'm gone," Anthony Wigginton would often tell a co-worker at Morgan County Parks and Recreation Department.

Retirement day finally came for Wigginton on Aug. 1.

After 34 years of beautifying and maintaining county parks Wigginton put away rakes, shovels and everything he used to do his job.

"He was our groundskeeper and did a great job," said Bruce Lackey, director of Parks and Recreation. "He worked a few years in District 2 at West Park, but he mainly worked in parks and rec most of his employment. He kept the parks looking nice, cutting grass and making sure everything was in top shape. He was our longest serving employee and had good experience. We will miss him."

Athletic Director Valerie Scott said Wigginton would often make a profound statement to her.

"He was one of the first people I met when I started here 14 years ago," said Scott. "He used to say all the time: 'You're going to miss me when I'm gone.' I would say, yea, right."

Wigginton's prediction has come true.

"He is just a likable person, and I do miss him," she said. "I still call him."

Although his official retirement date was Aug. 1 the department gave him a party on July 18th.

Anthony Wigginton at his retirement party on July 18th at the Parks and Recreato9n building.

"The county lost a lot of experience with Anthony," said County Commission Chairman Ray Long, who attended the party. "I certainly want him to know how much we appreciate the good job he did for all those years." He began working for the county in the 1970s.

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 reproduced. This is the fourth edition.

We have indicated stories that are accompanied by video. You may view videos by going to www.co.morgan.al.us. There, click county departments, then select Communications/Community Relations and click on multimedia.

Find us on Facebook

Morgan County Commission

AND

@MorganCoComm

Chief

Continued from page 1

lin. More than 34 of those years have been served in this county.

"I've worked for seven sheriffs and I've been blessed to be surrounded by good people," said Corley. "I always knew I would be in some type of emergency work or law enforcement because my greatest fulfillment comes from helping in situations where people are suffering or in danger."

Corley was drafted for the Army in 1971 and narrowly escaped the Vietnam War zone.

"By the time we came out of training to go to Vietnam they had frozen all of that," he explained. They re-cut our orders and let us stay on the state side."

He was a medic while in the Army.

While stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky Corley started investing time in his career.

"I was drafted into the Army for two years, but I knew I was getting out a few months early, so I started going home on the weekend to volunteer at the sheriff's department. I looked forward to it every weekend," he shared.

When he was honorably discharged from military service he became a deputy with the Cullman County Sheriff's Department. He worked there until 1975 when he decided to get into the cattle business.

"I bought and raised cattle and worked at a small processing business for a while. Eventually, I bought their livestock and began trading mostly on my own," Corley said.

He kept the cattle and to this day is still in the trading business, but his love for law enforcement never died. He returned to his career in 1979 going to work as a deputy for then, Morgan County Sheriff Van Ward.

Time brings change

Crime was a lot different from today.

"When I first started I never saw any drugs," he recalled. "The first drug I saw was marijuana and now we seldom run across it. Meth and other more high power illegal drugs are out there and our department is doing a good job of fighting the drug war. We had a few major crimes, but most of the crimes were alcohol-related, specifically moonshine. Teenagers would drag race and good ole boys would have fist fights and we'd answer those calls, but that was about it."

Then, more drugs began to surface, fueling other crimes such as thefts and burglaries.

"The statistics will show that so much of the stealing and robberies and other crimes are drug-related," said Corley.

Equipment for crime solving was scarce, also.

"We've advanced in the tools we use to help solve crime," he said. Back then we had limited capabilities. We didn't have private channels we went through the North Alabama Network for calls and information. Now we have seven frequencies licensed to the sheriff's department that we operate under. From the tools we're provided to scientific resources such as DNA, technology has rendered advancement."

High profile case

The most memorable high profile murder case for him was in 1999 when the sheriff's department found a mother's dead son on top of her in a rock crusher at Eva. She was still alive.

"Charles Stewart and a gang of his had a scam going where they would force their way into people's homes and take their check books," Corley said. " He and some others went to the home of Florence Nichols and kidnapped her and her son James Nichols. Deputies were already working a call about them being missing and the next morning they were discovered in the rock crusher at Gum Pond. They had broken James Nichols' neck and placed him on top of his mother, who was a small, fragile elderly woman."

"I knew about Stewart's background and while we were at the scene, I asked…'wonder where Charles Stewart was last night,' and 15 months later he was arrested for the murder and kidnapping," Corley added.

Before Stewart's capture, the hunt became intense, and gained national attention with America's Most Wanted and the Discovery Channel bringing cameras here to boost the search.

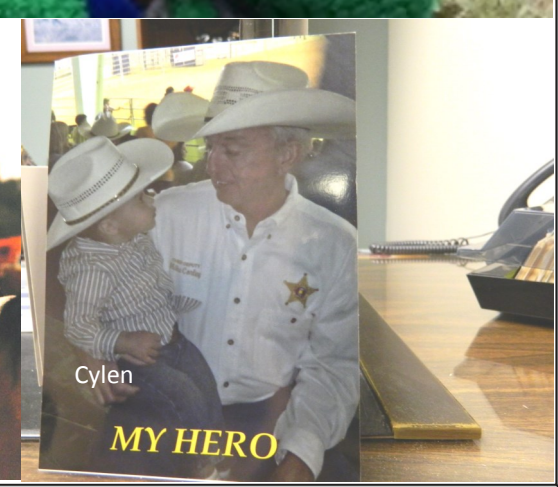
"Somebody told me they saw a re-play of it not long ago on the Discovery Channel," said Corley.

A break in the case came more than a year later when authorities found Stewart living in a cave in the Lawrence Cove area.

"We surrounded the cave and we captured him early that morning," said Corley. "It was a great feeling. The case was

Please see Corley, page 5

Chief Corley &



Grandkids

Reaching goals for children

Morgan County Child Policy Council identified needs, providing solutions

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

An organization that the Alabama Legislature created several years ago to help children is achieving goals in Morgan County.

The Children's Policy Council over which Morgan District Court Judge Shelly Waters presides, is meeting or exceeding goals to meet children's needs.

"The council was created to serve and ensure that the needs of the children of Morgan County are met," Waters said. "It serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas, the formation of partnerships and to further the cause of children in this county. Morgan County by reputation is a community of action, a community that gives and a community that when necessary, can activate a legion of volunteers to carry out whatever project or event is needed. We are very fortunate that business, church, community leaders, and elected officials have an atmosphere and spirit of cooperation."

The law, which was passed in 2000 and amended in 2008, mandates membership for the policy council which includes juvenile judges, school superintendents and representatives of other agencies including the Department of Human Resources.

A needs assessment earlier this year concluded the following as priority:

A firm educational foundation for youth

Encouraging family economics, job training and parent education

Prevention, intervention and treatment for mental health and substance abuse issues, and establishment of a safe environment for children

The council identified agencies with resources to help fill those needs.

Members of the Child Policy Council 's Education/Early Development Committee listen and take notes as District Judge Shelly Waters brief them on about an assessment to identify the needs of local children.

Here are some of the achievements by agency/organization:

Department of Human Resources: Received full funding for child support unit; served as a pilot for program to provide more education for foster parents.

Mental Health Center for NCA: Summer day treatment program for those with emotional and behavioral issues; provided onsite drug assessment programs at System of Services; onsite counselors for the county's three school systems; in-home counseling for children.

Decatur Youth Services: Proactive in addressing gang issues; although lost funding the parenthood program services continued; served 1800 families in 2012.

Volunteer Center: Friend to Friend program helps at-risk children; although lost funding mentoring program continues; partnership with Decatur City Schools.

Juvenile Drug Court: Added a probation officer to coordinate drug court; and drug court participants getting mental counseling.

Neighborhood Christian Center: Taught Smart Moves program at Boys and Girls Club; assisted four students with college textbook expenses; provided tutoring services at local school and mentors for

Please see council page 7

Garbage collection

Morgan County Environmental Services Department runs regular garbage routes on all holidays with the exception of Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. Garbage routes are re-scheduled for those two holidays. Other county offices are closed on holidays. Occasionally district shop workers have to work holidays if there's an emergency with roadways.

Corley

Continued from page 4

turned over to federal law enforcement and they all went to prison."

Corley has been chief deputy more than 10 years, having served for former Sheriff Greg Bartlett and now Sheriff Franklin.

County Commission Chairman Ray Long says Corley is highly respected and appreciated.

"Chief Corley represents what's good about law enforcement," Long said. "He has given decades to Morgan County in various roles helping to keep our residents safe and we greatly appreciate his service. His experience is of great value to this county and we're glad he's here."

When he's not herding, or trading cattle, Corley spends quality time with daughters, Candice and Courtney, and his grandchildren Kipton, Camden and Cylen.

"They are the joy of my life," he shared. "We spend a lot of time together."

If he had to choose a profession again:

"I don't know what it would be," he said. "Sure, I'd do a lot of things different but I don't know that I would be in a different field. I'm the type of person I can still learn and I do. Not only does it make me a better officer but a better person."

Retirement is not in his plans right now.

"I'm a workaholic ," he said. – "That's all I know. As long as I'm blessed with good health and they'll still have me, I am going to work. I've had so many good people who have propped me up and helped me. They've been good to me and for that I am grateful. It's been a pleasure for me to serve the people of this county and to work with others."

Courthouse wedding

Harris and Vickery marry where they first met

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

They met at the courthouse and married there.

After a two-year engagement Assistant District Attorney Garrick Vickery and Attorney Kirby Marie Harris exchanged marriage vows before family and friends in Circuit Judge Glenn Thompson's courtroom on Aug. 1.

While chatting with some in attendance before the marriage ceremony, Kirby's mother, Terri Harris, pointed out that the lace around her bouquet of fresh flowers was from the bonnet Kirby wore home from the hospital after birth 30 years ago.

There was no pacing, but Garrick had to go back home to get Kirby's ring.

She was confident he would return and he did.

Dennis Harris escorted his daughter into the courtroom where Assistant District Attorney Charles Elliott and Decatur police investigator Kirk Arrington stood with Garrick and Kirby's matron of honor and maid of honor were there for her.

Left, Kirby with her parents, Terri and Dennis Harris. Right, Circuit Judge Glenn Thompson performs the couple's marriage ceremony.

Judge Thompson then performed the ceremony.

The couple received congratulatory cheers.

After a small reception with family at a local restaurant, the couple was off to Costa Rica, Terri Harris said.

When they returned they were to enjoy a bigger reception aboard the Pickwick Belle Riverboat.

Kirby's law practice is located in Hartselle and Garrick is a prosecutor in the DA's office.

They live in Decatur.

By the way, they were married on the anniversary of their two-year courtship.

Audit without findings rendered for circuit clerk's office

Report from former Circuit Clerk John Pat Orr's term in office

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

Former Morgan County Circuit Clerk John Pat Orr left office with financial clearance from a flawless audit that involved $28 million.

His successor Circuit Clerk Chris Priest assumed accountability when he began in January, and he says financial record-keeping for the office is excellent and he's confident of perfect audits in the future.

Why?

Deputy Circuit Clerk Janell Conner, a state employee for 38 years, is still keeping the books.

"Janell is an intricate part of our office," said Priest, who became clerk on Jan. 15. "When a circuit clerk is elected he has the choice of naming his deputy clerk among the employees. She was deputy clerk under John Pat and it was a no-brainer who I would appoint. She has as much power as I do. She can make decisions for the office in my absence."

Deputy Circuit Clerk Janell Connor and Circuit Clerk Chris Priest were happy about clean audit.

"I'm just doing my job and I love what I'm doing," Connor quipped. "If I didn't I wouldn't still be here."

Priest explained that the audit covered from September 2009 to January 2013.

"It was done by the Alabama Department of Finance in January because John Pat's last day was Jan. 14th and I began the next day," said Priest.

The audit did not list any findings.

Connor said the audit was conducted for Orr's exit and Priest's entrance.

"It was to make sure Chris started with a clean slate and John Pat went out with a clean record," Connor said.

The money circulates through the office for civil and criminal cases.

"Defendants in civil cases pay money awarded to plaintiffs and some of the money paid in criminal cases goes to victims, the state general fund and the County Commission," Priest explained.

Connor added: "The money is coming in and going back out each month. As soon as we get an order it's paid out."

Priest says Connor has set a high standard.

"She is the definition of servant leadership." he said. "She doesn't give tasks to anyone that she's unwilling to do herself."

Connor added: "This place has been my life. I'm thankful to have a job."

Council

Continued from page 5

local schools and mentors for SOS; Provides summer art program.

Decatur Launch: Conducted a leadership day focusing on financial goals; weekly educational programs; job shadowing in engineering and veterinarian professions; helped participants with registration and preparation for GED, and provided various classes for other areas.

Community Action Partnership: Instrumental in starting Pre-K initiative; increased foster grandparent in schools; implemented a tracking system for pre-k in public schools.

Decatur Heritage Christian Academy: Center for excellence provides opportunities for elementary students to participate in after school programs offered to schools in the state; provided a counselor for the Policy Council.

King James School: Served 50 students who would otherwise not be in school. Four levels of education provided.

Morgan County Schools: Planned funding for Families and Children Together; Credit Alternatives, a program that is helping 12 students graduate on time and 24 students get back on course; and tutoring for students to take the Alabama high school graduation test.

United Way of Morgan County: Expanded tutoring and mentoring programs for Boys and Girls Club and Big Sisters and Big Brothers in local schools.

Decatur City Schools: Increased school safety; boosted college and career readiness after academic tutoring, drug court partnership and partnership with the Department of Youth Services.

Athens State University: Providing path for advanced studies in early childhood education.

Department of Public Health: Provides immunization for children for updated school records. Offers Tobacco Prevention program for national youth survey on tobacco usage. Implemented a two-year trial program through the Women Infants and Children program to reduce childhood obesity.

Hartselle City Schools: Offers early morning tutoring for graduation exam and for regular school courses. Created the Intensive Care Unit for students who make zero on major tests; implemented Early Release Time program for teachers and students.

Morgan County Child Advocacy Center: Increased therapy sessions for children and families.

Mental Health Association: Conducted child safety conference, Red Ribbon march, obtained a youth grant and offers other programs to help children with matters such as self- esteem.

Boys & Girls Club: Offers tutoring program, life skills training, career development for teenagers and the Be a Great Graduate program for teens.

Decatur-Morgan Hospital – West Campus: Creative writing program received national recognition when named a "Bright Idea" recipient by the Volunteer Hospital Association. The organization plans to blueprint the program to use in other psychiatric hospitals.

The needs assessment is reviewed by the state Legislature and is used to help agencies in the county obtain grants, Waters said. The material, including accomplishments of agencies involved with children is outlined in the assessment.

"The needs assessment is mandated by law," Waters explained. Once the assessment is completed the documents are submitted to Montgomery and are used to determine the needs of the county for allocations for funding of projects. The council serves as a conduit for information and ideas." District Judge Charles Langham said the council is effective.

"It allows these agencies to network and provide each other with information on the many programs offered in Morgan County to achieve worthwhile goals," Langham said. "Children are better off because of it."

Pre-trial

Continued from page 1

"We will not let them in if the victim doesn't agree," said Anderson. "Our hope is that victims will recoup any restitution quickly rather than having to wait for months or years."

Bearden goes to district court arraignment hearings to offer applications and other documents pertaining to mandated rules of the program.

She signed up a participant on the first day of the program, and steady enrollment has continued.

"They fill out the application and bring it to the office and from there we will talk with them and their attorneys," Bearden explained. "It's a voluntary program and the district attorney will decide if they're accepted."

Requirements focus on improving participants' quality of life. If they don't have a high school diploma they will either have to go back and finish high school or enroll in a program to acquire a General Education Diploma (GED).

"They must enroll and receive their GED before completing the pre-trial program," said Bearden. "This will be helpful to them in getting on the right course."

Other requirements while in the pre-trial program include employment and U.S. citizenship or resident alien status. Each participant will report for monitoring monthly to Bearden's office and must submit to drug testing through Morgan County Community Corrections. Those accepted for the program will have to pay fees per monthly visits, court costs and restitution to the circuit clerk's office.

They must present payment receipts to Bearden.

Before entering the program defendants are required to plead guilty to charges that will be dropped if they complete Pre-trial Intervention, which could last from six months to 24 months.

Although defendants may choose the amount of time they feel is suitable for them, the DA's office has the right to assign them to a period that's deemed necessary, Bearden said.

Anderson is hopeful that the program will be successful and change lives from wayward paths.

Bearden said it's off to a good start.

Pre-trial Intervention

Program requirements

Eligibility requirements

Must be 18 years old at time of offense

Must be a first-time offender

Offender must admit guilt

Offender cannot be charged with Class-A felony

Offense cannot involve: serious physical injury or death; a victim under age 14 or a sex offense involving forcible compulsion or incapacity of a victim; a law enforcement officer, school officer, corrections officer, active duty military personnel of a U.S. military branch or a person 65 or older.

Offender must not have any other pending charges

The alleged crime must have been committed in Morgan County (not another county)

Participation must be approved by the district attorney and is subject to judicial approval, also

Criteria for acceptance

Justice is served by enrollment in Pre-trial Intervention Program

Needs of the state of Alabama are met through the program

Offender does not pose a substantial threat to the safety of the community

Must have approval from the victim and arresting agency

Unlikely that offender will be involved in further criminal activity

Offender will respond to rehabilitative treatment

Offender does not have an extensive criminal history

Offender will be subject to administrative fee when signing program agreement and must comply with all terms of mandatory rules

Must agree to pay restitution if applicable, and any court costs, attorney fees, drug screen fees and those for counseling/treatment programs, educational programs and monitoring

Must agree to maintain employment

Offenders must have read terms/conditions of the program or had them explained to them and acknowledge that they understand the material

Anderson goes over program details with Bearden in her office which is located in the district attorney's office on the fifth floor of the courthouse.

"The program kicked off great," she said. "The program has been successful in many other counties throughout the state, and my goal is to make ours one of the most successful in Alabama. I believe that will happen."

Always busy doing something

Hartselle seniors like variety

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

They like old movies featuring stars like John Wayne, Katherine Hepburn and Betty Davis.

They exercise, play card games, eat and chat.

Residents who go to the Hartselle Senior Citizens Center enjoy a full slate of activities at the facility adjacent to the city's Civic Center.

"It's a form of recreational pastime and you get to visit with other people. It takes you away from the television and home affairs. It gets you out of the house," said Jimmy Nesmith.

Dan Price, manager of the center, confers with a council of the senior citizens to develop a monthly calendar of events.

"The activity calendar is an ongoing process of creativity," said Price. "We have movie days, and half of them love watching movies and half don't care for them. For those who don't want to watch a movie we opened up another room so they can play their card games. Some like playing Canasta and others like Rook."

The movies vary.

"They've watched Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, and they look forward to seeing Betty Davis classics and other movies featuring James Dean, Jimmy Stewart and John Wayne."

They watch movies twice each month.

Another fun activity is sharing an evening meal.

Please see video

at

www.co.morgan.al.us

They board an MCATS bus once a month to go to a restaurant. The event is listed on the calendar as "Supper Bus".

In August they went to a Huntsville eatery.

"This is for people who typically enjoyed going out to eat, but are not doing so now because they no longer drive," said Price. "They really enjoy the outing."

Price allows the seniors to show off their cooking skills through various contests including biscuits and cornbread. Nesmith won the cornbread contest and Eveline Millican was winner of the biscuit challenge.

The seniors praise Price for making their time at the center exciting.

"This is a real good place and Dan does a very good job of leading us and directing the affairs here," said O'Neil Parker, 79, of Hartselle.

Like the other senior centers, the Hartselle site serves a nutritious lunch daily.

On this particular day the meal included turnip greens and Price led a song titled "Turnip Greens". When they finished singing, they ate.

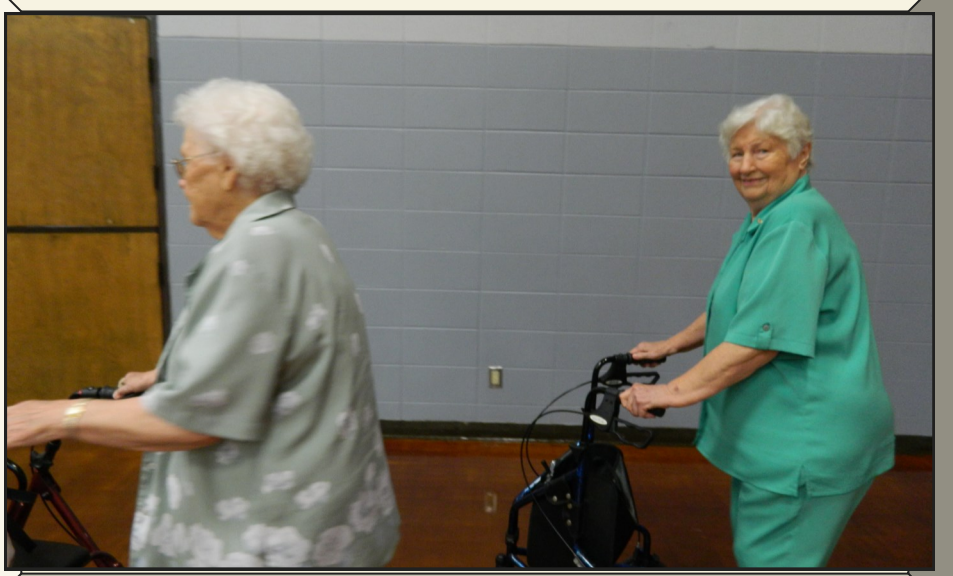
"One of their favorite activities is Hymnal Day when they sing songs or we have an outside musician to come and sing," Price said.

The seniors enjoy wellness activities, also.

Luttie Glenn, 88, and Eveline

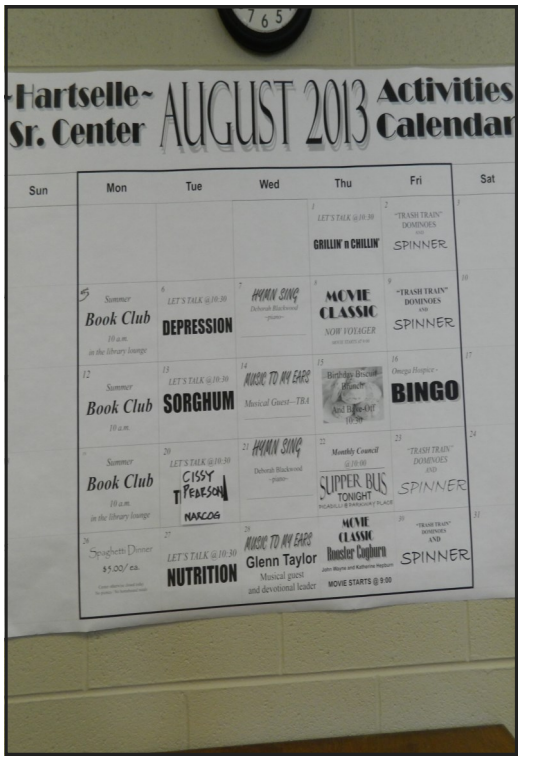
Please see Hartselle, page 9

Wellness walk



Luttie Glenn and Eveline Millican

Left, residents relax at the Hartselle Senior Center. Below, a calendar of events for the month of August.



Hartselle

Continued from page 8

Millican, 83, both of Hartselle went to the gymnasium next door and finished a lap…on walkers.

"We believe in getting our exercise," Glenn said.

The senior centers operate under Morgan County Commission on Aging and Director Debra Gardner is well in touch with each facility.

"They have a lot of fun and it's always a pleasure to see them enjoying themselves," Gardner said. I'm glad the county is able to provide these outlets and services for them."

Senior citizens enjoy a variety of activities at the Hartselle center. A day of activities at the center include card games, eating and jigsaw puzzles among other things.

NARCOG coordinator warns seniors about telephone scam

By Sheryl Marsh
~~Communications Director~~

Don't give personal information to telephone solicitors, who could empty your bank account and steal your identification.

That's the message relayed to about 16 aging residents at the Hartselle Senior Citizens Center in on Aug. 20.

NARCOG Senior Medicare Patrol Coordinator Cissy Pearson informed the seniors about a recent scam that involves Medicare.

"What they're doing is calling and saying they need personal banking information in order to send you a new Medicare card, and that's not true," said Pearson. "There are no new Medicare cards. It's a scam they're using on senior citizens."

Pearson said various phone numbers appear on a person's caller ID. In one particular case she said a Florida number displayed on a resident's phone.

Fraudulent callers also ask for other information including the name of their physician, claiming they need it to activate the new card.

Pearson told the seniors that Medicare doesn't need to know their bank account number or any of the other information. She told them to "hang up" on the scammers.

She also told them to examine the summary notices they receive quarterly, which show transactions to make sure there are no items that were ordered or charged falsely. Although it would not cost Medicare recipients anything, these types of illegal acts would help deplete program funding, Pearson said.

The seniors appreciated the information.

"It's very valuable," said Jimmy Nesmith, 83. "We get so many phone calls until you wouldn't believe it. We've gotten a call about every night from a fellow saying somebody paid for a medical alert system for us and he's going to ship it to us. I just hang up because nobody has paid for anything for us."

O'Neil Parker, 79, said he is alert to fraudulent calls and ignores them.

"You just don't talk to them once you realize that they're trying to get personal information," Parker said. "

In addition to the Medicare scam Pearson gave information about how seniors could protect their identity by stopping mail-outs of pre-qualified credit offers. She gave them documents to complete to stop phone and mail solicitation.

Above, Dan Price introduces Cissy Pearson below, on Aug. 20 at the Hartselle Senior Citizens Center. Pearson warned seniors about a Medicare scam.

The Danville Road Project:

A race against time

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

When flood waters eroded a portion of Danville Road, closing it for travel, District 2 Commissioner Randy Vest didn't opt for patch work.

Instead, he declared an emergency and launched major reconstruction of the roadway. The collapse in the road occurred in July and time was not in Vest's favor because school would begin in August.

The County Commission approved hiring a contractor and the deadline for completion was before school began.

The deadline was met and now it's smooth driving on the once heavily damaged area of Danville Road with no sign that there was ever disrepair.

"We didn't put a bandage on a major problem," said Vest. "We wanted a long-term solution and that's what we got. It took hard work, dedication and a will to succeed to get the job done."

Vest shared specifics about the project.

"We replaced a failed metal pipe with a pre-cast bridge structure and concrete reinforced decking over No Business Creek," he explained. "When the flooding went through the pipe, which had a hole in it due to age, the water caused suction around the pipe, which eroded the road and it caved in."

District 2 employees helped with the project, excavating and hauling away damaged materials from the site. Vest's shop supplied backfill rip rap for the project, which shop workers hauled to the site.

Cost for the contractor was $115,000 and Vest said he has not totaled the cost for the materials and labor he provided.

The area that was repaired was roughly 200 yards.

The work was finished on or about Aug. 15, a month after the damage occurred.

"We were extremely pleased with the project and the cooperation of utility companies

Please see major, page 15

Danville Road reconstruction from beginning to end

Mowing grass, road building and dirt tossing

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

Mowing grass, rebuilding roads and tossing dirt for new construction are a few of the projects in progress in Morgan County's four districts.

There is no idleness in a workday for commissioners and their employees.

"We just finished all of our before-school projects and now we're back working on a turn lane in front of the site for the new Priceville High," said District 1 Commissioner Jeff Clark. "Before school started we put in holding lanes for Priceville Elementary to help with traffic and we helped fix a parking lot and did work around new bleachers at the football stadium at West Morgan. We've stayed relatively busy."

After completion of the Danville Road project District 2 Commissioner Randy Vest is focused on building the new Somerville Senior Citizens Center.

"We've got the site preparation at elevation and next we will have a firm come and test the soil to make sure it's suitable for construction," said Vest. "Once we get the okay we will gravel the parking lot area and it will be turned over to a contractor to begin the building process. The steel building has been delivered."

The center's exterior will be brick veneer.

District 3 Commissioner Don Stisher has been busy mowing grass throughout the area and completing road and bridge projects.

"Grass, grass, grass. Wow! What a summer," Stisher gasped. "Maybe some of our grass cutting will slow down now that we're not having as much rain. But aside from that we have several projects that we've completed and some that are yet ongoing. O.Z Davis Road has been resurfaced and

Please see mowing, page 13

Left, District 1 employees working on drainage project on Bethel Road for new Priceville High School. Right, employees building road in front of the school site that will include a turn lane.

Left, a District 3 employee cutting grass. Right construction of Wilhite Road Bridge

Morgan, Decatur officials enter agreement for county/city annex

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

The Morgan County Commission and Decatur City Council have finalized an agreement to build a jail annex to house county and city inmates.

Each government entity voted to approve a 23-page contract in August.

The new annex will house 320 inmates, which will include an overflow from the county jail and all of Decatur's inmates. Under the contract Decatur will have 120 slots for housing inmates.

The current city jail capacity is 100, Mayor Don Kyle said.

The pod style county jail was occupied in 2006 and at times it has almost reached its bed space capacity of about 560, Chairman Ray Long said.

"I don't know if it's more criminals or we're just catching more, but we're frequently topping 500," Long said during a press conference last month.

The chairman anticipates construction of the annex beginning by October and completion of the facility a year later. The contract with Volkert Inc. of Birmingham specifies a 12-month construction period. Volkert will oversee the project.

The new facility will be near the main jail on property the county owns.

Initially, the county had planned to build a two-floor facility to house minimum security inmates. The city showed interest in the facility and from there the joint agreement emerged.

In addition to the chairman and mayor brainstorming on the new jail, Kyle said the police chief and sheriff, finance departments and legal teams for both entities also met frequently to troubleshoot potential problems and work out everything to build a favorable contract for everyone involved.

The new jail will house a portion of the county's community corrections program, also.

Estimated cost of the facility is $7.4 million, of which Decatur will pay $2 million. Also, the city will pay $100,000 per month to the county for 20 years.

Kyle said the city jail averaged around 89 inmates last year and 15 of them were females. He said the city will get an extra benefit from joining the county to build the new jail.

"The existing county jail has a female pod, which has available space, therefore city female inmates will be housed there and all city male inmates will go to the new annex," Kyle explained.

Long said the joint effort sends a message of unity between the city and county.

"We're proud of this agreement and it shows that we can work together," Long said. "That's the way it should be."

Sheriff Ana Franklin said she is pleased with the contract and she looks forward to the partnership with the city.

"This is a great endeavor and I believe it will all work out just fine," Franklin said.

Please see jail, page 15

From left, Chairman Ray Long, Sheriff Ana Franklin and Mayor Don Kyle sign pages of a contract for the new jail annex that will be built near the main county jail.

Surrounded by county commissioners and city leaders, Commission Chairman Ray Long speaks during a press conference at the courthouse in August. He informed the group of the county and city reaching an agreement on a contract to build a new county jail annex that will house county and city inmates.

Sheriff's Department employees providing valuable services

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

Morgan County sheriff's deputies do more than just ride in vehicles throughout the communities.

They perform multiple duties in providing protection and service for residents throughout the county.

When they get the call they respond quickly.

Deputies answered 12,427 calls from January through April.

"Our patrol and deputy supervisors have taken a more proactive approach to deter crime and are in the front line for our law enforcement throughout the county," Sheriff Ana Franklin said. "The service they provide throughout our county is invaluable."

Increasing law enforcement presence is a key factor in lowering crime numbers in communities.

"They are the first responders of the sheriff's office and the foundation of a safer community," Franklin added.

Also, the officers are responsible for securing courtrooms during proceedings, transporting defendants from jail to prison and they travel throughout the country to return suspects on extraditions among other duties.

Although tasked with more confining duties, employees at the county jail play a major role in the sheriff's operation.

The jail is staffed with 102 corrections officers, who are assigned to guard in-

Please see sheriff, page 15

Grass

Continued from page 11

is re-opened. Wilhite Road Bridge is under construction and we did a lot of site cleaning and shoulder building down there."

Also, District 3 workers have been replacing drainage pipes on Thompson Hollow Road and clearing rights-of - way.

"We also finished with a drainage project at Falkville, and we did a lot of work around Falkville High, including their football field," Stisher added.

A concession stand at Brindlee Mountain Park in District 4 could be finished within the next six weeks and dirt that was tossed for a senior citizens center at Union Hill is now being prepared for a foundation.

"We've got the blocks laid for the center and we're going to put the plumbing in," said District 4 Commissioner Greg Abecrombie. "They are about to build the foundation. The concession stand is rouged in and they are about to finish it. The senior site could be completed by the end of December or the first of January."

Left, District 1 work on Bethel Road for Priceville High. Right, Thompson Hollow Road drainage work in District 3..

Left, workers building foundation for the new senior site at Union Hill. Right, this concession stand at Brindlee Mountain Park should be finished in six weeks.

Left, Somerville Senior Citizens Center site is prepped for foundation. Right, Workers added a turn lane for traffic at Danville-Neel Elementary.

Area farmers seeing better crops second time around

By Sheryl Marsh
Communications Director

After heavy rain decreased early spring harvests, area farmers have seen better days in weeks following.

During August vendor tables at the Morgan County-Decatur Farmers Market were colorful with vegetables and fruits.

James Hanserd, a Limestone County farmer said he experienced minor loss of crops in the spring, but crops planted later are plentiful.

"We lost squash and other vegetables in the beginning, but tomatoes, peas and beans that we planted did well," said Hanserd.

Dale Letson, of Scott's Orchards in Hazlegreen said the farms there didn't experience produce or fruit loss.

"We have a good crop of peaches and we'll have a good crop of apples, too," said Letson. "We also had good produce, tomatoes, corn, squash and all. The rain earlier didn't hinder us at all."

Marilyn Champion of Champion Farms in Morgan County said the farm overcame the rain, but now the heat threatens her crops.

"We're worried that if we don't get any rain the turnip greens are going to burn up," Champion said. "The heat has already burned up a patch before this one."

Overall, Champion had a hefty display of tomatoes, beans, okra, peas and watermelons.

The farmers market is scheduled to close Nov. 9th for the season and manager Burl Slaten said he expects farmers to have late crops. Slaten said weather conditions caused loss during both spring and summer.

"If it gets too hot and dry you're going to have the same problems you have if it gets too wet," said Slaten. "Everybody has planted late crops and they may have a good end of September and October. Peas have been the biggest loss because what you have is water settled in the ground and when the heat mixes it causes a scalding. A lot of the earlier loss is because there was no pollination due to all the rain. The lack of pollination also caused a lot of the peas, beans and tomatoes not to make."

Slaten said vendors would probably have peaches to sell through a period in September. After closing in November the market will re-open in April.

The market is located on First Avenue.

Vegetables are plentiful

Area farmers are seeing better harvests now that the weather is drier. Top, James Haserd of Limestone County had a good yield of vegetables in August. Left, Dale Letson, of Scott's Orchards in Hazel Green had a large stock of peaches and vegetables. Marilyn Champion, right, of Champion Farms in Morgan County had a table full of vegetables and watermelons.

Sheriff

Continued from page 12

mates and perform other duties as well. Warden Leon Bradley supervises the jail staff and Franklin helps him oversee inmate programs for such issues as substance abuse that were developed to help rehabilitate inmates. Other programs are available also to help them return to a stable, clean lifestyle once they're free.

"Inmates are encouraged to take part in these programs to give them the skills they need to successfully re-enter society," Franklin said. "These programs are provided by voluntary method at no cost to the taxpayers."

The sheriff's department has many volunteers who give of their time and resources to help local law enforcement. The Morgan County Sheriff's Posse performs various types of duties. Posse members ride horses at rodeos and parades, and they may also be called upon to assist in search and rescue of Dementia patients who wander into wooded areas. The sheriff also has reserve officers who provide security for community events, accompany deputies on patrol, help provide security for court and perform jail duties.

"The volunteers who support the sheriff's department provide an added layer of safety and security to our communities," Franklin said. "We appreciate their participation so much."

Please see duties, page 15

Long

Continued from page 1

motivating membership to work on important programs for the year," Brasfield said. "We don't know what will be on our front page for 2015, but clearly Ray has the ability to lead our Association and he has the full support of the membership."

As vice president, Long will be the liaison for affiliate groups of ACCA including county engineers, revenue officers and county administrators. Long is on the Executive Committee and he will work closely with the state Legislature which will require him to be in Montgomery frequently. When Long advances to president in two years he will represent Alabama counties in Washington, D.C. and Montgomery.

Stisher

Clark

Decatur-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director/CEO John Seymour said Long has made local residents proud of county government.

"The citizens of Morgan County, especially the Chamber of Commerce, appreciate his leadership. "We should all be proud that he is recognized on a state level."

Long is humbly grateful.

"It's an honor to be recognized by my peers statewide," Long said. "It's not just an honor for me, but for Morgan County, also. We will have a bigger impact on legislation to help the whole state. My first priority, however, is Morgan County."

Clark, Stisher re-elected

Also, during the summer conference, two commissioners were re-elected to posts that they have held for several years. District 1 Commissioner Jeff Clark was re-elected to the ACCA Board of Directors and District 3 Commissioner Don Stisher was re-elected to the Legislative Committee.

"It's an honor to represent our county," Clark said. "We're able to get a lot done this way."

Stisher shared the sentiment.

"I always look forward to being a voice for the people I serve," Stisher said. "I enjoy working to make our county as well as other counties in the state better. I am proud of our county and enjoy working with my colleagues and others throughout the state."

Long began his duties as vice president immediately. Stisher and Clark resumed duties.

Duties

Continued from page 14

School safety is important here and throughout the nation, and that's why Franklin has deputies as school resource officers, who are responsible for certain schools in their respective patrol areas. If something happens the officers would be able to act quickly. Priceville High School partnered with the sheriff's office and now has Jeff Burbanks as a full-time resource officer.

In addition, Franklin uses the K-9 Unit in the schools to provide educational programs, which includes demonstrations. The unit is used also to conduct random searches of illegal drugs in schools.

Recently, Morgan's K-9 Unit became certified through the United States Police Canine Association, Region 22.

"The K-9 program has grown over the past two years, thanks in part to the generous sponsors in our community, who have provided financial support through gifts and donations," said Franklin.

The sheriff says she plans to tap into other resources to continue to enhance safety.

"Our goal is to acquire all available resources to provide safety to our residents."

Jail

Continued from page 12

The mayor said files and possibly administrative cubicles could be considered for immediate use of the old city jail once it becomes empty. A long-term goal for the facility he said would be, "To preserve the footprint of that city property."

Major

Continued from page 10

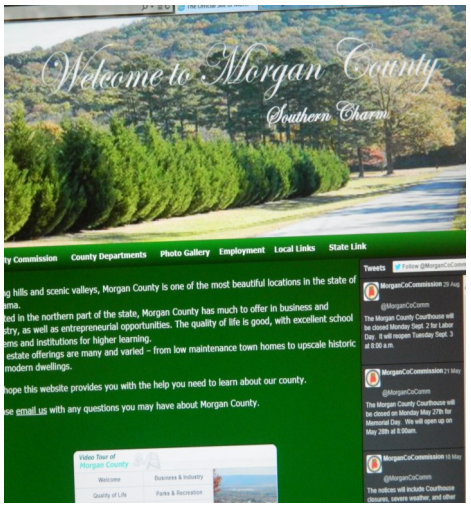
that had to relocate lines before the contractor began," he said. "We were happy that the job was finished days before school started. While we were there we took the time to install a right-hand turn lane at Danville-Neel school and that will be a tremendous help with traffic there."

Beautifying courthouse grounds

Darryl Bolding talks with a crew from All American Sprinklers as they put finishing touches on one of several cement borders they placed around flower beds at the courthouse in August.

New website design shows Morgan County's beauty

Our website has been totally redesigned and launched. There you will find information you need to know about the county as well as recent and archived copies of this publication. The design is intended to highlight the county's beauty and assets to make it appealing to those who might be looking to re-locate. Also, there you will find videos from the community. Enjoy.



www.co.morgan.al.us

Thanks to our sponsors

We would like to thank our sponsors for help with the cost of this publication. Our goal is to keep the public informed about how their tax dollars are being spent, and to share interesting stories about people and places in our great county.

Any business interested in becoming a sponsor of this publication is encouraged to call Communications/Community Relations Director Sheryl Marsh at 256-560-6093, or send her an email: smarsh@co.morgan.al.us

Renasant Bank

The Rogers Group

The 3M Company

Decatur-Morgan County Chamber Of Commerce