Media outlets, pundits, analysts, and just about everyone else have weighed in on the ongoing U.S.-China trade war. Georgia’s farmers are but one group caught in the crossfire. China has historically been a significant importer of Georgia commodities. With the two countries at odds over trade imbalances, what will be the ultimate outcome for Georgia’s farmers?

At a recent meeting of the Douglas Rotary Club, Dr. Serrina Liu, Assistant Professor of Agricultural and Applied Economics at the University of Georgia’s Tifton campus, discussed this complex issue.

In short, a higher tariff drives costs up for the importing country. As consumers pay more for a given product, producers prosper and are understandably happier. The opposite happens for the exporting country. A higher tariff means that more goods will stay in the home country. With more supply and less demand, prices drop domestically. As a result, consumers are happy while producers are not. “A tariff will cause a price difference between the importing and exporting countries. That results in higher prices for the importing country and lower prices for the exporting country,” stated Dr. Liu. She added that higher tariffs are a way of protecting domestic industries. However, she also stated that it’s bad for the overall welfare of the economy.

The root of the trade war is a sizeable trade imbalance between the United States and China. It’s enormous — to the tune of $375 billion. Increasing tariffs is a way of equalizing that imbalance. But there will be effects. Using cotton as an example, Dr. Liu demonstrated how the trade tensions could affect Georgia farmers.

China has been a good customer to Georgia’s farmers. China imports almost every crop produced by Georgians. In the wake of the trade war, that could change. China will most definitely import fewer commodities from Georgia. But, stated Dr. Liu, it’s not all doom and gloom.

For example, China typically imports a great deal of cotton for its textile industry — more than any other country in the world. In fact, the U.S. exports 74 percent of the cotton it produces, stated Dr. Liu. With potentially rising tariffs, China would begin importing cotton from Australia, Brazil, and India. But it would still need more. With China off the market for domestic cotton, American farmers are beginning to export more cotton to Vietnam, India, and Indonesia. There, workers will turn the cotton into yarn and other fabrics, which those countries would then export to China. “So now it’s not a one-on-one relationship; it’s a triangle relationship,” stated Dr. Liu. “We will still export a lot of cotton, just not to China.”

Long-term, Dr. Liu said that the market should stabilize. In the short term, however, Georgia farmers will see a price drop. To alleviate that, the federal government has stepped in and offered subsidies to farmers to offset lost revenue as a result of higher tariffs. In short, the tariff is unfortunate but won’t be as bad as economists and farmers originally thought — at least not as far as the cotton industry is concerned. “We still have strong cotton prices this year. We can send cotton to other countries so Georgia won’t be hurt as bad. But the government’s help for farmers is costly to the taxpayers. Eventually, everyone was impacted by the Chinese tariffs,” said Dr. Liu.
Premium Peanut opens new peanut oil mill

“We built the shelling plant to get some value out of a peanut. Now we’ve built the oil plant to get more value out of that peanut. Down the road, the goal of the board and management is to continue to find more value in the peanut to get for our owners and not to be a cookie-cutter sheller but to be a little out of the box and get some new products. We’re working every day toward that,” said Kent Fountain, Chairman of Premium Peanut’s Board of Directors, at Monday afternoon’s ribbon cutting and grand opening of Premium Peanut’s new oil mill.

Premium Peanut began as a shelling-only plant in January 2016. In two short years, the facility has experienced phenomenal growth; this latest expansion is but one indicator of the company’s unprecedented success. The oil mill is expected to produce over three million gallons of peanut oil per year.

As one might expect, a number of local, state, and federal dignitaries attended the event. Among them were Gary Black, Georgia Agriculture Commissioner; Pat Wilson, Georgia Economic Development Commissioner; and U.S. Rep. Rick Allen. Also in attendance was Coffee County’s state legislators – Rep. Clay Pirkle, Rep. Dominic LaRiccia, and Sen. Tyler Harper.

“We are proud of what we’ve accomplished in terms of creating jobs – over 200 – and the investment we’ve made. We’re close to $100 million in direct investment to make this business work,” said Karl Zimmer, Premium Peanut President and CEO. He also stated that Premium Peanut ships to 25 countries all over the world from Douglas.

Several hundred people from throughout the region as well as Premium Peanut customers from around the world attended Monday’s event. They were treated to a catered lunch and then, after the speakers, tours of the shelling plant and the new oil mill.
AGRICULTURE

CMS ag students create SAE projects

An agricultural education program is made up of three integrated parts: classroom instruction, FFA and a supervised agricultural experience (SAE). The SAE is a required component of a total agricultural education program and intended for every student. Through their involvement in the SAE program, students are able to consider multiple careers and occupations, learn expected workplace behavior, develop specific skills within an industry, and are given opportunities to apply academic and occupational skills in the workplace or a simulated workplace environment. Through these strategies, students learn how to apply what they are learning in the classroom as they prepare to transition into the world of college and career opportunities.

Soybean growers return to Washington to talk tariffs

The American Soybean Association is back in Washington, D.C., just weeks after their July Board of Directors meeting. Grower leaders are meeting with officials at the Department of Agriculture and with lawmakers to talk over options for offsetting the long-term damage from China’s retaliatory tariff on American soybeans.

John Heisdorffer, ASA President, says they know that President Donald Trump is aware of just how hard the tariff battle is hitting agriculture, especially soybeans. “The recent announcement that the European Union is buying more soybeans is a welcome step,” Heisdorffer says. “Given the scale of potential damage from the tariff, we need more market-opening measures if we are going to survive the repercussions on soybean exports.”

The ASA is asking officials to increase funding for export promotion in the new farm bill. The soybean growers are also asking the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee to support negotiating new free trade agreements. ASA is asking that the North American Free Trade Agreement is in place by the end of the year. They also want bilateral agreements in place with countries like Japan and others to help expand overseas access. The last item they’re asking for is increased funding to upgrade inland waterways.
Ag losses due to Hurricane Michael substantial, will be felt for generations

Early estimates of agricultural losses caused by Hurricane Michael are starting to come in from the University of Georgia and Georgia Forestry Commission, and the numbers are staggering, according to a press release issued by the Georgia Department of Agriculture.

“Georgia has long led in the production of several renowned commodities and now we have the dubious distinction of also leading in the devastation and incredible loss of these prominent crops,” said Georgia Agriculture Commissioner Gary W. Black. “These are generational losses that are unprecedented, and it will take unprecedented ideas and actions to help our farm families and rural communities recover.”

Timber is a mainstay in South Georgia with many small or private landowners owning timberland. Approximately one million acres were destroyed, resulting in $1 billion in losses.

Cotton was the second highest contributor to Georgia’s farm gate value last year, contributing just over seven percent, with expectations for record yields this year. Estimated losses from Hurricane Michael range from $300 million to $800 million. The final loss estimate will be dependent on the ability to harvest what remains in the field.

For the third straight year, Georgia pecan farmers took a significant hit from a hurricane. Trees were either blown over or broken, resulting in an estimated $560 million loss. The damages will have a generational impact since it takes about seven years for a tree to begin producing marketable pecans.

Georgia is home to a wide variety of produce including sweet corn, cucumbers, squash, peppers, tomatoes and peas, which suffered an estimated $480 million loss. Farmers were counting on high yields and strong prices for their fall harvest after experiencing a difficult spring harvest.

Poultry is Georgia’s leading agricultural industry, contributing nearly $23.3 billion to Georgia’s economy. Michael will make a lasting impact on this poultry industry with the loss of 97 houses and well over two million chickens. The losses are estimated at $25 million.

While peanuts fared better than many other crops, infrastructure damage remains uncertain. Estimations for peanut losses range from $10 to $20 million, with the final loss estimate to be determined by the ability to get the remaining peanuts out of the field and into storage facilities, as well as graded and sorted.

Other industries affected by the storm include cattle and agritourism. Fall is calving season for many Georgia cattlemen who are facing extensive damages to fence and lack of access to water, requiring them to haul water to their animals. Fall is also typically the most important season for many agritourism sites with corn mazes and pumpkin patches that bring many families and school field trips on the farm. Multiple mazes have been destroyed in addition to other farm damage. The loss estimate will be difficult to determine, even after the season is over.

“The meter started at $1 billion and jumped quickly to nearly $3 billion,” Commissioner Black said. “Unfortunately, we are not quite sure where it is going to stop.”

Mississippi native John McLemore joins extension office

The University of Georgia Extension would like to welcome John McLemore as the Agricultural and Natural Resource agent in Coffee County. John is from Hattiesburg, Mississippi where he was raised on a small commercial beef cattle farm. As a youth he was involved in FFA, 4-H, Beta Club, and was an Eagle Scout. As a member of FFA and 4-H he participated in many career development programs which inspired him to pursue a career in Extension.

John earned a Bachelor in Agriculture and Information Science and Master of Science degree in Plant and Soil Sciences from Mississippi State University. John’s thesis project to obtain his master’s degree was to develop heat tolerant cool-season legume species (balansa clover, berseem clover, crimson clover, and hairy vetch) for implementations in early-planted corn in southern Mississippi. His project stemmed from Mississippi farmers’ interest in early-planted corn to avoid heat stress typically between July and October. Cool-season species that are able to germinate immediately following corn harvest are able to sequester residual soil nitrogen from the prior commodity crop. While conducting his research project he learned valuable practices and lessons that will help him better serve the community of Coffee County.

John has been an advocate of agriculture who is eager to teach, serve, reach, and present non-biased research-based information to the community of Coffee County. As a youth and young adult, he has experiences with animals, FFA, 4-H, horticulture, commodity crop production, and collaborating with various organizations. John can be reached by phone (912-384-1402) or at john.mclemore@uga.edu. He began his new role on December 1.
AGRICULTURE

Dry conditions ruled early part of 2018

Georgia farmers should expect dry weather when they plant their crops this spring, but Pam Knox, University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences agricultural climatologist, anticipates an active tropical storm season in the Atlantic Ocean this summer.

Growers watch the weather closely because it determines when growers schedule operations like spraying, cattle grazing and irrigation. “Coming out of the moderate La Nina event that we had this winter, neutral conditions are expected by late spring,” Knox said. “When this happens, there seem to be drier conditions that are not good for planting.”

Once crops are planted, growers rely on rainfall or irrigation to supply water to the crops. If there is a lack of precipitation, farmers must increase the operation of their irrigation pivots. Precipitation in Georgia was low in January and February, which caused an increase in drought conditions. But cooler weather and increased rainfall in March alleviated some of those dry conditions, Knox said.

Because it is an El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO)-neutral year, the interaction between the atmosphere and the ocean produces a slight periodic variation between below-normal and above-normal sea surface temperatures. This means that, during hurricane season, from June 1 through Nov. 30, there will likely be more named storms.

Last year, Hurricane Irma damaged crops across the southwestern part of Georgia. The Gulf of Mexico is very warm again this spring, which could lead to the rapid intensification of storms over that region, according to Knox. “I suggest closely monitoring the weather forecast to see if you are in the path of a storm,” Knox said.

To deliver updated news to growers, Knox uses observations and satellites to track weather predictions. “I look at all of these models to simulate what we might expect, but weather is always changing,” Knox said. “You always have to be prepared.”
Georgia farmers need assistance to keep from losing their farms

By Clint Thompson for CAES News

To avoid losing their farms following Hurricane Michael, Georgia farmers need financial relief as soon as possible, according to Jeff Dorfman, a professor and agricultural economist in the University of Georgia Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics.

South Georgia growers are still picking up the pieces after the hurricane hit Oct. 10-11, destroying homes and agricultural commodities. The storm’s timing could not have been worse for the producers who were impacted, as cotton, pecans, peanuts and vegetables were ready to be harvested.

“The timing of this was not good,” Dorfman said. “Farmers have already spent most of, if not all, their money growing their crop. If you lose a crop at the start of the growing season, at least you didn’t put any of those extra inputs into it.”

Dorfman believes growers, who normally would have sold their crops by now and had revenue to pay off production loans, are not going to be able to cover those costs this year. “We have at most three months, maybe as little as one month, to sort that out, but this definitely could put a lot of farmers out of business,” Dorfman said.

Hurricane Michael caused more than $2.5 billion in losses to Georgia’s agricultural sector, the state’s leading industry, according to estimates from the UGA Cooperative Extension agents and agricultural economists. “Until we know how much insurance relief we get, how much insurance is going to cover, how much disaster relief payments are going to cover, we won’t know how bad the bite on the broader economy is going to be,” he said.

Cotton and pecans are the Georgia crops impacted most by the storm. Pecans suffered $100 million in direct losses to this year’s crop, $260 million in losses due to lost trees and $200 million in direct losses for future income.

“It’s going to take pecans 15 years to recover; that’s a pretty hard hit. And Georgia’s got a bunch of businesses that depend on pecans, especially during the holidays. We’ve got fewer pecans to use in other businesses now,” Dorfman said.

Georgia’s cotton crop suffered between $550 and $600 million in direct losses. Poultry, the leading agricultural industry in Georgia, suffered $20 million in direct losses to houses and $8 million in losses to birds.

“We lost 129 poultry houses and I think some of those will not be rebuilt. Poultry will be smaller for a while,” Dorfman said.

Georgia’s vegetables suffered $480 million in direct losses, while timber was dealt $763 million in losses.
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In an initiative to advance the level of cardiac care available to patients of Coffee and surrounding counties, and continue the “Bring it Home” initiative to bring vital healthcare services home, Coffee Regional Medical Center (CRMC) is proud to announce the launch of its new Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PCI) Program. After successfully completing a multi-level process, Coffee Regional has received its approval from the State of Georgia’s Department of Community Health to begin offering cardiac intervention services.

Under the encouragement of Coffee Regional CEO Vicki Lewis, the development of this new service line was approved to begin in July 2018. This project was spearheaded by Executive Vice-President Sherry Thomas and Cardiac Cath Lab manager Julie Peterson. An independent consulting firm, Corazon, Inc., was brought in to ensure all items were well-managed through each step of the development process. Their accreditation process exceeded the requirements of the Georgia Department of Community Health and ensured CRMC met and, into the future, sustains established best practice standards for the PCI Program. Cardiologists, of CRH Cardiology Group, Dr. Glenn Evans, Dr. Joel Ferree, and Dr. Willie Bell along with Eddie Roberts, PA-C worked to ensure the cardiac catheterization lab and its employees were prepared for the new program. All physicians working in the new program have extensive experience in cardiac catheterization procedures. Countless members of Coffee Regional have worked diligently to ensure this new program would be patient focused and quality driven.

Though this is a very exciting time for Coffee Regional Medical Center and the citizens of this community. To better understand the importance of timely cardiac intervention, imagine you are holding your breath. It’s hard to do for a lengthy amount of time, right? When someone has a heart attack, most often without warning, an artery is being blocked of normal blood flow. During this time, a person’s heart is being deprived of oxygen. Every second counts when it comes to opening that blocked artery. Heart muscle begins to die rapidly after a full blockage and the length of time a person goes without that vital oxygen-rich blood determines the amount of heart muscle/tissue damage that is done. Often times, if a vessel is able to be reopened swiftly the patient can make an impressive & quick recovery, right here at home.

The new PCI Program will allow the Interventional Cardiologist to place a stent along the walls of the blocked artery, restoring blood flow. The procedure is minimally invasive and typically performed by placing a catheter in the artery percutaneously (through the skin) around the groin or wrist area. A catheter is pushed through the artery into the heart to diagnose any blockage. The procedure is minimally invasive and typically performed by placing a catheter in the artery percutaneously (through the skin) around the groin or wrist area. A catheter is pushed through the artery into the heart to diagnose any blockage. The procedure is minimally invasive and typically performed by placing a catheter in the artery percutaneously (through the skin) around the groin or wrist area. A catheter is pushed through the artery into the heart to diagnose any blockage.

There will be an interventional cardiologist on call 24/7. Expert interventional cardiologists from Emory Health System in Atlanta, GA and the Ashchi Heart and Vascular Center in Jacksonville, FL will be assisting Dr. Evans with interventional cardiology call. These physicians bring years of knowledge and expertise to the program.

“We are very pleased to launch our interventional cardiology program here at Coffee Regional Medical Center under the leadership of Dr. Glenn Evans. His expertise in cardiology will bring an invaluable service to Coffee County as well as to our neighboring communities,” says Vicki Lewis, CEO of Coffee Regional. “In partnership with our highly-skilled, dedicated staff of cardiologists, we look forward to bringing this new level of quality cardiovascular care to the communities we serve.”

This is the beginning of growing a strong cardiac program that meets the needs of Coffee County and residents of South Georgia.” said Sherry Thomas, Executive VP of Patient Care Services.
Coffee Regional Medical Center was recently granted a certification of accreditation for Diabetes Education Accreditation Program (DEAP) from the American Association of Diabetes Educators. Coffee Regional has long been focused on the diagnosis and quality of care for chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, and this accreditation is one of many efforts CRMC has made to offer improved diabetes education to our community.

Diabetes is a chronic disease that affects the body’s ability to produce the hormone, insulin. There are 4 recognized types of diabetes: Type 1, Type 2, Gestational, and Pre-Diabetes. The symptoms of diabetes include frequent urination, excessive hunger, extreme thirst, blurred vision, fatigue, and nausea. Uncontrolled diabetes can lead to complications including blindness, kidney disease, slow healing wounds, and even death.

According to the Georgia Department of Public Health, between 2000 and 2013, there were 223,924 diabetes-related hospitalizations in Georgia. More than 1 in 10 adults in Georgia has diabetes. Many more have pre-diabetes, which is where preventative measures can make a big impact on preventing that person from developing diabetes. Making healthy food choices, being active, managing stress, monitoring blood glucose (sugar) levels, and using medications as directed are essential to staying healthy and preventing a person from developing certain types of diabetes.

Learning you have diabetes can be overwhelming. Both the potential serious side effects, mentioned above, and the management of the condition is a lot of information to take in and understand. DEAP offers excellent diabetes education resources that will enable our diabetes educators to offer the latest and best information to patients. Ensuring our community is as successful as possible with diabetes prevention and management requires support, compassion, and understanding. That is where CRMC Diabetes Support Group comes in.

Dr. Chester Royals was among 1,970 Initiates from around the world who became Fellows of the American College of Surgeons (FACS) during the Convocation ceremony at the College’s 2018 annual Clinical Congress in Boston, Mass., last month. This year’s class of Initiates was among one of the largest ever admitted into the College.

Dr. Royals received a medical doctorate from Mercer University School of Medicine in Macon and is currently practicing at Coffee Regional Medical Center with CRH Surgical Group. By meeting the College’s stringent membership requirements, Fellows of the College have earned the distinguished right to use the designation of “FACS” (Fellow, American College of Surgeons) after their names. An applicant for Fellowship must be a graduate of an approved medical school; must have completed advanced training in one of the 14 surgical specialties recognized by the College; must possess certification by an American surgical specialty board; and must have been in practice for at least one year at the time of his or her application. Before admission into Fellowship, the surgeon must further demonstrate ethical fitness and professional proficiency, and his or her acceptance as a Fellow of the College must be approved by three-fourths of its Board of Regents.

The Convocation ceremony was the highlight of the five-day Congress at which initiation into ACS Fellowship took place. The Congress also featured reports on research-in-progress, postgraduate courses, panel discussions, symposia, and scientific and industrial exhibits. Total estimated attendance at the Congress was 12,463, including 8,522 physicians. Allied health professionals and members of the scientific and consumer media also attended the meeting.
Coffee Regional Medical Center was among a select group of hospitals nationwide recognized for promoting enrollment in state organ donor registries in a national campaign, the Workplace Partnership for Life (WPFL) Hospital Campaign, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

CRMC conducted awareness and registration campaigns to educate staff, patients, visitors and community members about the critical need for organ, eye and tissue donors and, by doing so, increased the number of potential donors on Georgia’s Organ and Tissue Donor Registry. Participating hospitals earned points for each activity implemented between October 2017 and April 2018 and earned award levels platinum, gold, silver or bronze depending on how many points they accumulated. CRMC was awarded gold recognition for their efforts during this year’s Workplace Partnership for Life Hospital Campaign.

Throughout the country, more than 1,200 hospitals and transplant centers participated in the campaign, and 468 platinum, 176 gold, 360 silver and 244 bronze awards were achieved. Of those, 72 are Georgia hospitals. See the full list of recognized hospitals here. Georgia ranked 4th among other states with the number of hospitals receiving an award; with only Pennsylvania, California and Florida acquiring more awards.

“Coffee Regional is a great champion for organ, eye, and tissue donation. We are proud of this accomplishment and applaud CRMC for making a difference in the lives of the more than 5,200 Georgians that are currently waiting for transplant,” says Michelle Burkett, Hospital Development Liaison with LifeLink of Georgia, “It is because of these professionals’ unyielding dedication to saving lives that we applaud their achievements.”

The need for organ and tissue donation is real. Every 11 minutes another person is added to the national transplant waiting list that currently lists over 114,000 people and sadly, approximately 22 people die daily because of the organ shortage. To register your decision to be an organ, tissue and eye donor visit Donate Life Georgia’s Organ and Tissue Donor Registry at www.DonateLifeGeorgia.org or call 1-866-57-SHARE (74273), or say YES to donation when you get or renew your driver license or state identification card through Georgia’s Department of Driver Services.
Coffee Regional Medical Center was pleased to partner with LifeLink of Georgia to honor and remember those who gave the gift of life through organ and tissue donation. On January 1, 2019 the Donate Life Rose Parade Float, titled *Rhythm of the Heart*, included a dedication garden made up of roses with handwritten notes by hospital CEO’s from across the country, including Vicki Lewis, CEO of Coffee Regional.

The float was covered in dedicated flowers celebrating transplant recipients and living donors, honoring deceased donors, and thanking individuals and groups who support and take part in the donation and transplantation community. Each dedicated rose was placed in an individual vial that carried a unique and personal message of love, hope, and remembrance. Vicki Lewis shared, “With this rose dedication, CRMC publically recognized our staff’s dedication and commitment to organ and tissue donation. We are pleased to partner with LifeLink of Georgia on this project and honored to have been a part of this celebration of life watched by millions on New Year’s Day.”

Celebrating its 16th year in the Rose Parade, the Donate Life float continued its mission to save lives and heal by delivering the message of organ, eye and tissue donation to the world. “Rhythm of the Heart,” highlighted the musical diversity and rhythms of Africa. Djembe drums from Senegal, along with a Kuba drum from the Congo, featured 44 floral portraits honoring the brave lives of deceased donors. Overlooking the detailed floragraphs was a double Senufo mask from the Ivory Coast that gave thanks to ancestors and remembered those who have passed away. The double face suggested male and female, past and present generations, and the power of donation. The instruments were chosen for the float design since they play important roles in the storytelling nature of African songs. At the rear of the float were Chiwara headdresses from Mali, which are featured in dances that teach youth the value of community. Eighteen living donors and transplant recipients rode on the float while an additional eight walked beside it. In addition to a vast array of tropical foliage and flowering materials imported from Africa, more than 25,000 roses were displayed throughout the float.
CRMC earns ‘A’ rating from Leapfrog Hospital Safety

Coffee Regional Medical Center has recently earned an A rating according to the Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade, works to bring transparency to the public, bringing information forward on hospitals safety and quality management scores to help consumers make informed decisions about where they receive their care.

When making health care decisions, patients should use all available tools at their disposal such as talking with friends and family and consulting with doctors, nurses and other health care providers. The latest Leapfrog rating system is just one tool, among many, patients can use when making health care decisions such as choosing a hospital. The Leapfrog grade is one of these important tools.

Looking at 28 performance measures, a single letter grade is produced representing a hospitals’ overall performance in keeping patients safe from preventable harm and medical errors. Leapfrog assesses over 2,600 general acute-care hospitals across the nation. Coffee Regional has chosen to participate in the Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade as a way to be more transparent to patients and learn ways to improve quality of care.

The latest Leapfrog report highlights Coffee Regional’s commitment to improving patient quality and safety. Georgia hospitals continue to enhance their patient safety efforts, with 35 percent receiving an A grade and meeting the highest safety standards. Coffee Regional is consistently working on the improvement of patient satisfaction and quality management. The CRMC health care team has multi-level processes in place that track all aspects of patient care, ensuring that quality improvement and accident prevention are at the forefront of care on a daily basis.

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Douglas-Coffee County Chamber, EDA select John A. Henry as president/CEO

The Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Authority have selected John A. Henry, an experienced economic development professional, as the new president and chief executive officer of the two organizations. Stuart Smith, president of the EDA, and Donny Bradshaw, chair of the chamber, made the announcement this week.

“John is bringing a wealth of economic development knowledge to the table,” according to Smith. “The EDA board, with support of the chamber, has vetted candidates extensively over the past several weeks. This is a great move for our organizations and John in terms of opportunities for success.”

Henry most recently served as chief executive officer of the Effingham County Industrial Development Authority in Springfield, Georgia, a position he held since 2006. For three years of that tenure, he led both the chamber and industrial development authority for Effingham County. Henry started his career at the authority as a project manager in 2005.

The Screven County native graduated with a bachelor’s degree in economics from Armstrong State University in Savannah and earned a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree from John Marshall Law School in Atlanta. “I have a passion for economic development,” according to Henry. “I have invested my career in the field, from workforce development to marketing, and believe my skills will match well with Douglas and Coffee County. I look forward to working with the existing businesses in the area and establishing a clear strategy to attract new investments and jobs.”

Henry was very successful in Effingham County with recruitment and expansion initiatives. High visibility projects that he led include PortFresh Logistics, DRT Americas, OmniTRAX and EFACEC Power Transformers. Henry worked with Interfor, Edwards Aerospace and Halstead International to expand their operations in the coastal area.

Georgia law requires that the EDA wait at least 14 days after they name a finalist and release certain information before final action can be taken to fill the president and CEO position. Accordingly, the EDA will not take final employment action on selecting Henry until mid-May with his first date on the job set for May 14.

Henry and his wife Samantha have two children. The family will be moving to Coffee County in the next few months. The Chason Group, an executive search firm specializing in economic development, chambers of commerce and foundations, assisted the EDA with the executive search.

As part of the search process, the firm conducted several days of stakeholder interviews with community, business and government leaders on local, regional and statewide levels. A nationwide search was then initiated utilizing a weighting scale of the key character traits required of the new leader.
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Douglas-Coffee County loses economic development giant
Garland Thompson

Douglas-Coffee County loses economic development giant Garland Thompson

Garland Thompson, age 90, of Douglas, passed away on Monday, December 17, 2018 at his residence. Mr. Thompson was born on June 5, 1928 in Soperton, the son of the late Clifford Thompson and Troy Spivey Thompson.

Mr. Thompson was a veteran serving in the United States Marines and attended the First Baptist Church.

He played a direct role in the economic development of the City of Douglas and Coffee County, resulting in thousands of new jobs for his community. Garland helped relocate many businesses to the Douglas and Coffee areas, including several Fortune 500 companies. Garland’s significant organizational and leadership talents, his remarkable patience and diplomacy, his keen sense of vision, and his sensitivity to the needs of the citizens of this state have earned him the respect and admiration of his colleagues and associates.

He was a graduate of Soperton High School, received his associate’s degree from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, his bachelor’s degree from the University of Georgia, attended the Louisiana State University School of Banking and the University Of Georgia School of Banking. From 1957-1970, Garland was employed as a County Office Manager with ASCS and from 1970-1993, Garland worked as a Senior Vice President at Trust Company Bank of Coffee County. He formerly served as a member of the Board of Directors of SunTrust Bank, the senior consultant of the United States Economic Development Council, the Chairman of the Georgia State Soil and Water Conservation Committee, a member of the Coffee County Young Farmers Association, Vice President of the Coffee County Kidney Foundation, a member of the Douglas Rotary Club, the director of Sunbelt Exposition, the Vice President and Supervisor of Altamaha Soil and Water Conservation District, and President of ABAC Golden Alumni.

Elixir Extrusions announces second expansion in Douglas

The Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDEcD) today announced that Elixir Extrusions, a manufacturer of custom aluminum extrusions and fabricated parts, will expand its operations in Douglas-Coffee County, creating 130 new jobs and investing $8 million. This is Elixir Extrusion’s second expansion in 15 months.

“Congratulations to Elixir Extrusions and Douglas-Coffee County on this exciting expansion news,” said GDEcD Commissioner Pat Wilson. “Georgia continues to maintain a strong reputation for being a leader in manufacturing, and it’s a win-win for the state when an existing industry expands and continues to find success in Georgia.”

Phase one of the expansion will create 50 jobs, and phase two will create 80 jobs. Elixir will take over an existing 70,000 square-foot speculative building that was built by the Douglas-Coffee County Economic Development Authority (DCCEDA). The building will be expanded by more than 100,000 square-feet and utilized by Elixir for warehousing and additional production.

“The entire Elixir Extrusion team would like to thank the City, County and elected officials for their continued support shown to our business,” said Elixir Extrusions President Phillip Smith. “Elixir would especially like to thank Stuart Smith, EDA Chairman and John Henry, President of the Development Authority for all their work and dedication shown throughout this process. Elixir cannot say enough about the support shown by Douglas and Coffee County.”

GDEcD Assistant Director of Existing Industry and Regional Recruitment Michelle Shaw represented the state throughout this project, and worked closely with the DCCEDA.

“We are certainly excited to see continued growth from one of our best corporate citizens,” said DCCEDA Chairman Stuart Smith. “As this company continues to grow in our community it will bring good jobs and positive economic impact. It is great to see a company grow and thrive here in Douglas. It is direct evidence that our economy is flourishing. We look forward to working with them as they undertake this latest expansion to insure that they continue to expand in our community. Elixir Extrusions is a great corporate citizen and we are proud that they call Douglas home.”

Elixr Extrusions is a great corporate citizen and we are proud that they call Douglas home.

He was a graduate of Soperton High School, received his associate’s degree from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, his bachelor’s degree from the University of Georgia, attended the Louisiana State University School of Banking and the University Of Georgia School of Banking. From 1957-1970, Garland was employed as a County Office Manager with ASCS and from 1970-1993, Garland worked as a Senior Vice President at Trust Company Bank of Coffee County. He formerly served as a member of the Board of Directors of SunTrust Bank, the senior consultant of the United States Economic Development Council, the Chairman of the Georgia State Soil and Water Conservation Committee, a member of the Coffee County Young Farmers Association, Vice President of the Coffee County Kidney Foundation, a member of the Douglas Rotary Club, the director of Sunbelt Exposition, the Vice President and Supervisor of Altamaha Soil and Water Conservation District, and President of ABAC Golden Alumni.

Elixr Extrusions is a great corporate citizen and we are proud that they call Douglas home.

He formerly has served as President of the Douglas-Coffee County Industrial Authority, an executive committee member of the Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce, State Representative for the American Bankers Agricultural Committee, State Representative for the Council for Agricultural Research and President of the University of Georgia Agricultural Alumni. Garland has been recognized for his outstanding contributions with numerous awards, including the Humanitarian Award from the East Central Technical College Foundation, the Georgia Agricultural Hall of Fame award, the Governor’s GIDA Volunteer of the Year award, the Honorary American Farmer award from the Future Farmers of America, the AGHON from the University of Georgia, the Pilot Club Man of the Year in Agriculture award, the GACAA Friend of the County Agent award, an Honorary Membership from the Georgia Young Farmers Association, the Appreciation Award from the University of Georgia Agriculture Alumni, the GACDS man of the Year award from Soil and Water Conservation, the University of Georgia Advisory Board Gold Kist “Good Egg” Award, a Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce Honorary Membership, the Kiwanis Davis Award, the GACDS Hall of Fame Award, the Daughters of the American Revolution Award, the Volunteer of the Year Award from the City of Douglas and Coffee County, the NACD SE Region Hall of Fame Award, and the Kiwanis Community Service Award.

Garland Thompson was an outstanding, godly and dedicated citizen of Georgia, evidenced by his devoting innumerable hours of his time, talents, and energy toward the betterment of his community and keeping Christ at the center of his home and family.

In addition to his parents, Mr. Thompson was preceded in death by his wife, Anita Burton Thompson.

Survivors include three sons, Kirby Thompson (Roseanne) of Atlanta, Andy Thompson (Kim) of Soperton, and Tim Thompson of Greensboro, N.C.; daughter, Beth Harrell (Keith) of West Green; brother, Jaudon Thompson (Cathy) of Perry; five grandchildren, Betsy Oliver (Louis), Macie Thompson, Kip Thompson (Allison), Katie Harrell and Trent Harrell; two great grandchildren, Hank and Kate Oliver.
Saralyn Stafford of Broxton, a community and economic developer with a 30-year career focused on Georgia, joins the University of Georgia in July to link rural communities with UGA’s vast knowledge and expertise.

“Economic prosperity in rural Georgia is a top priority for the state and a strategic priority of the University of Georgia’s outreach programs,” said Jennifer Frum, vice president for public service and outreach at UGA. “Saralyn is well known as a collaborative and knowledgeable leader with great passion for rural Georgia, and we are thrilled to have her join our team.”

Stafford will serve as a liaison between UGA and local elected officials, chambers of commerce, economic development professionals, school boards, nonprofit organizations, small business owners and other community leaders.

Based in South Georgia’s Coffee County, her work will focus on connecting communities with UGA’s Public Service and Outreach units, including the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, the J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development, the Small Business Development Center and the Archway Partnership, to assist in addressing community and regional challenges.

“Saralyn will do aggressive outreach with all of our constituencies, primarily in South Georgia, to help create jobs, develop future leaders and assist rural communities with using their unique assets to promote economic prosperity,” Frum said.

Stafford to lead UGA’s rural economic development initiative

Stafford has a strong record of working in community and economic development across the state since 1987 with a focus on rural communities, particularly in Southeast Georgia. As a local economic developer and chamber of commerce president for 15 years, Stafford led efforts in the city of Waycross and in Coffee and Pierce counties.

She has served in various leadership capacities at the Georgia Department of Community Affairs in Atlanta for the past 16 years. Most recently, she provided technical assistance and oversight for local and regional planning, research and surveys for local governments, downtown development, the state’s AmeriCorps program and the Keep Georgia Beautiful initiative as the department’s division director for community development.

At UGA, Stafford will also offer her expertise in training government officials and community leaders and in strategic planning within rural communities.
Nicholls, Douglas receive over $1.5 million from DCA

On Tuesday, Nov. 27, Nicholls received a 2018 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) grant in the amount of $565,078 from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), which administers the program on behalf of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Nicholls will utilize this grant for sewer improvements. The DCA also presented the City of Douglas with two checks: one, a CDBG check for $459,895 for water and sewer improvements along West Phillips Street, West Cherry Street, and Magnolia Street while the other in the amount of $528,484 for the improvements for the Elixir expansion and development of Roland Sahm Way Road.

Nicholls and Douglas were among 60 Georgia communities awarded this year. “Strong and prosperous communities help attract businesses and jobs,” said DCA Commissioner Christopher Nunn. “Projects like the ones in Nicholls and Douglas help stimulate economic development and enhance the quality of life for the whole community. CDBG is a vital community development tool for rural Georgia. This program’s impact can be felt in every corner of our state.”

Chamber of Commerce gets new Main Street Coordinator

Dave Hughes has been named the Main Street Program Coordinator for the Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce. This announcement comes following the recent transition of the Main Street Program from the City of Douglas. During the transfer of responsibilities, Mr. Hughes will continue to collaborate with Ms. Georgia Henderson to provide continuity of services for Main Street Program activities.

John Henry, President of Douglas-Coffee County EDA/Chamber stated, “Dave has been very instrumental in coordinating the Downtown Merchants’ Association and brings extensive retail experience to our team. I have faith that Mr. Hughes will be a diligent and passionate advocate for our downtown as we transition into this new role for the Chamber of Commerce. This position not only encompasses the downtown historic district but also includes recruitment for high-demand retail opportunities and other community revitalization programs.”

Mr. Hughes has over 40 years of experience in retail business management and local, regional and national sales. After retiring from Kmart Corp, he served as national accounts manager for MarCraft, Inc. and regional sales manager for US Marble & Granite. He and his wife, Sheila Hughes, own Kribs and Kradles and Top It Off Gourmet, both located on Peterson Avenue in downtown Douglas. Mr. Hughes is a graduate of LaSalle Senior High School in Niagara Falls, NY and served in US Army Reserve and National Guard for six years. He and his wife have one daughter, a son-in-law, and one granddaughter.
RIBBON CUTTINGS

Fitzgerald Family EyeCare
The Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce along with a multitude of family and friends gathered to celebrate the ribbon cutting and open house for Fitzgerald Family EyeCare. Dr. Ellen Drury Fitzgerald shared her sincere gratitude for all who encouraged and helped her along the way to this momentous occasion. Dr. Fitzgerald’s husband, Clay and their two children, Aubree and Asher, stood by her side as she thanked everyone who had a part in supporting her from the conception of the facility to the final touches that make it the beautiful facility it is today. She expressed a special thank you to her patients who have entrusted their eyecare to her. Most importantly, Dr. Fitzgerald gave thanks to the Lord for leading her into the eyecare profession that she feels is her calling and ministry to serve others.

On behalf of the Chamber of Commerce/EDA, Interim President Lisa Hodge and Chairman Donny Bradshaw along with City Commissioner Cindy McNeill and Pastor Shep Johnson, congratulated Dr. Fitzgerald and thanked her for not only her investment in the community but also into the lives of others. Since 2005, Fitzgerald Family Eyecare has provided personalized optometric services offering comprehensive vision examinations, diagnosis and treatment to patients in Douglas and the surrounding areas. Stop by and see Dr. Fitzgerald and the beautiful new facility located at 1329 Ocilla Hwy or call Fitzgerald Family Eyecare at (912) 393-0005.

The Shoppes at Tip Top
Thursday, December 6 at 10:30 a.m., the community celebrated the ribbon cutting for the Shoppes at Tip Top located at 107 W. Bryan Street in Douglas. A great crowd attended to celebrate the success of Shoppes owner Kayla Sellers and all the many business owners at the Shoppes. Representatives from the City of Douglas and Chamber of Commerce were both present to show their support and offer words of encouragement to each business owner: Also in attendance to pray over the businesses was Pastor Jody Silvers of New Corinth Church. The Shoppes at Tip Top is truly a treasure to have here in downtown Douglas, and these businesses and the community in which they are located will surely grow and prosper.

Dresses & Dreams
Congratulations to Alexa Smith, Owner of Dresses & Dreams, for her recent expansion and relocation in Downtown Douglas! Beginning at the age of 15 under the guidance of previous owner, Judy Russ, Alexa began fulfilling her dream of becoming a business owner. In just a few short years, that dream became a reality when she was able to follow in Judy’s footsteps by becoming the owner of Dresses and Dreams and has grown the business into the successful venture it is today. Joining the Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce to celebrate Dresses and Dreams expansion and relocation were several neighboring merchants, Chamber of Commerce and City of Douglas officials, family and friends. Lisa Hodge, Interim President of Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce, Pastors of Covenant Church, Gregory and Jackie Pope, City of Douglas Mainstreet Director, Pattie Parker, Mayor Pro Tem Kentaiwon Durham, Past Chamber Chairman Stanley Lott, EDA Chairman Adam Smith, Chamber Board members, Ben Floyd, Vette Lott and several friends and family were on hand to celebrate Dresses and Dreams ribbon cutting in the new beautifully renovated facility where dreams do come true!

Hog N’ Bones
Hog N’ Bones opened its doors Wednesday afternoon, if only temporarily. The restaurant formerly known as Jerry J’s has undergone a facelift and a menu change. Ownership, however, hasn’t changed. The restaurant is still owned by Darrin Naylor and family and belongs to the same franchise family. The rest will change. Wednesday afternoon, in anticipation of what was supposed to be a grand opening Thursday morning -- that’s been pushed back to Friday morning due to ongoing construction -- the Hog N’ Bones family hosted a ribbon cutting and served a few items from the new menu. A good group of local officials and Chamber of Commerce members attended the ribbon cutting and sampled the new offerings.

Originally a southern cooking-style restaurant under the Jerry J’s moniker, Hog N’ Bones is now a barbecue restaurant through lunch and supper. Breakfast isn’t changing. The same great breakfast dishes you loved at Jerry J’s will be available at Hog N’ Bones as well. Give the Naylors one more day to finish up the renovations. Then pay them a visit early and often beginning Friday morning. You’ll be glad you did.
**RIBBON CUTTINGS**

**The Drew House**

We are in love with The Drew House and everything in it! Ms. Judy Fender, the new owner of the beloved downtown antique store previously owned by Louis & Ruby Harper, feels blessed to be able to continue pursuing the passion for antique collections that she shared with her late husband, Jason Fender. Jason's parents, Bo and Francine Fender, spoke on behalf of their son and shared how pleased they are that Judy is able to honor him by fulfilling their dream to own an antique store. Many friends, relatives, City of Douglas and Chamber of Commerce representatives were on hand to help celebrate the special occasion and were served delicious refreshments. The Drew House is the perfect place to shop for unique antiques, collectibles, and gifts. Stop by to see Ms. Judy at The Drew House for an excellent shopping experience located at 108 North Peterson Avenue or give her a call at 912-384-0838.

**NPR South, LLC**

A multitude of friends, family, city and county officials joined by the Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce gathered to celebrate the grand opening and ribbon cutting of NPR South, LLC owned by Nicole P. Ricketson. Nicole shared her appreciation and gratitude to everyone that had a part in helping her along the way to grow her business from its conception during her 2012 senior year of high school in the co-op program to the expansion it is today offering material hauling, road striping, tax preparation and bookkeeping. Nicole is a 2016 graduate of UGA and soon transitioning back to Douglas from her position in Atlanta as a Certified Public Accountant. Upon her return to Coffee County, she will move into the beautiful new facility designed by her father, Ray Ricketson and Regan Tanner of Southern Real Estate Group and built by B & M Construction, Tracey Burke and Brian Moore. Nicole treated everyone to a delicious meal prepared by her aunt, Marguerite McKinnon Catering services.

**The Therapy Tree**

The Therapy Tree, founded in 2008 by Teresa McElroy, celebrated the relocation of its office complex with a ribbon cutting ceremony provided by the Douglas-Coffee Co Chamber of Commerce. Now located at 306 Shirley Avenue, The Therapy Tree continues to provide speech, language, voice and swallowing therapy and in 2019, will extend its services to include behavioral therapy. With very humble beginnings of providing speech therapy for only one patient in a trailer located in the small town of Nicholls, The Therapy Tree is now celebrating its 10th anniversary with impressive growth and services expanding to five cities in Southeast Georgia - Douglas, Baxley, Alma, Fitzgerald, and Hazlehurst. Congratulations, Therapy Tree, on the beautiful new office complex and 10 years of thriving business.

**Ellianos**

The Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce recently celebrated the ribbon cutting and grand opening for Ellianos’ second location at 1351 Southeast Bowen Mill Road. Ellianos is owned and operated by Dr. Larry and Sue Hutchinson along with their son and daughter-in-law Spencer and Kacie Hutchison. The Hutchison Family provided guests with irresistible muffins, cookies and coffee! Chamber Board Chairman Donny Bradshaw, Chamber Executive Board Member Tracy McClelland, College Ave Baptist Church Pastor Mark Mercer, and Mayor Pro Tem Durham were in attendance to show their support of Ellianos’ business expansion. In Douglas-Coffee County, business is brewing and so is a fresh cup of gourmet coffee! NOW SERVING LUNCH at the new location!

**In & Out Liquors**

In & Out Liquors recently celebrated their grand opening and ribbon cutting with the Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce. Owners, Harry and Mita Patel, provided pizza, doughnuts and drinks for customers throughout the day. The Patel's along with employees, Tawanna Jones and Phyllis Wesley, invite you to by stop to see them at 606 East Baker Hwy adjacent to In -N- Out Food & Gas.
**Fireside Pizza Shop**

As of November 1, 2018, Fireside Pizza Shop in Downtown Douglas has a new owner. This owner is no stranger. In fact, he’s been the general manager there for several years. Daryl Clark, along with Bobbie Reliford, have taken over as the new owners of Fireside Pizza Shop. Together with their team, they will continue to offer the same delicious pizzas, sandwiches, salads and soups that Fireside has become known for.

Fireside began when Francis Lott, owner of The Atrium, challenged Luke Christian to fill the restaurant space in the at that time newly renovated building. Mr. Christian, who already owned a build-your-own concept restaurant, Surcheros Fresh Grill, thought the same concept would work with pizza, sandwiches and salads. Plans were put in place to have a stone fired oven for a different kind of taste. In time, Fireside Pizza Shop became a favorite lunch or dinner stop in the gateway to downtown Douglas.

Luke Christian, CEO/Owner of Surcheros Franchising Corporation, made the decision to sell Fireside earlier this year. With the franchising of Surcheros Fresh Grill, there was not enough time to give both concepts the attention they needed. Mr. Clark was immediately interested.

Mr. Clark is an aspiring chef. He loves to use simple ingredients to make delicious bites that will leave you wanting more. So along with the Fireside favorites everyone enjoys, look for new menu items to be offered frequently. With hard work and creative new items, Mr. Christian and the Fresher Brands Management team know that Fireside will be taken to new heights.

A ribbon cutting was held on Thursday, November 15 to celebrate the change in ownership and introduce the community to the new owners.

**GiGi’s Gelato**

GiGi’s Gelato & Specialty Treats is now open and ready to serve you! The Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon cutting on Thursday afternoon, May 10. The owner, Ginger Diamond, was joined by her sons and several friends to help celebrate the special occasion. Ginger’s close friend, Ms. Vivian Johnson, shared inspirational words and a prayer for Ginger’s new endeavor.

On behalf of the City of Douglas, Mayor Pro Tem Kentaiwon Durham was on hand to congratulate and thank Ginger for her investment in our community. GiGi’s staff served guests samples of all the wonderful gelato flavors available. Guests inquired what the difference is between ice cream and gelato and learned gelato has much less fat, uses more milk than cream and most often, no egg yolks as opposed to ice cream.

Gelato is a great alternative for ice cream lovers to reduce their fat intake. From Bulldog Red Velvet to Salty Caramel, Minty Andes to Chocolate Turtle, be sure to stop by soon to enjoy a cup or cone. Several other delicious specialty treats are available in a variety of flavors. Stop by to pick up some special treats! GiGi’s is located at 520 North Peterson Avenue.

**CRH Oncology Group**

The Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce in coordination with Coffee Regional Medical Center held a celebration and ribbon cutting for CRH Oncology Group located at 903 B West Ward St. Community officials, business leaders, medical profession colleagues, several friends and family joined Oncologist, Dr. Eric Anderson and staff, to welcome the group and show their support of the expanding services offered by our local medical professionals. CRH Oncology Group specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer and provides medical care to reduce the severity of symptoms, relieve suffering and improve quality of life.

**Simply Sassy Boutique**

The Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce hosted a grand opening and ribbon cutting at Simply Sassy Boutique owned and operated by Chasity Bedgood. Many friends and family gathered to celebrate Chasity’s accomplishment. She extended a heartfelt thank you to the family, friends, City of Douglas and Chamber of Commerce who helped make this moment a memorable one. Chasity invites you to come by and shop with her soon! She has a variety of ladies fashions, jewelry, shoes, children’s clothing and more at great prices at Simply Sassy Boutique located at 222 South Peterson Avenue in Downtown Douglas.
CRH Pediatric Group
CRH Pediatric Group, located at 200 Doctors Drive, Suite P celebrated a ribbon cutting and community welcome for new physician, Dr. Renee Williams, who recently joined Dr. Joi Rogers in providing pediatric care.
Lisa Hodge, Interim President of Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce, Chamber Board Chairman Donny Bradshaw, Economic Development Authority Chairman Adam Smith and City of Douglas Mayor Pro Tem Kentaiwon Durham along with several other community officials, business and medical professionals, friends and family joined the celebration.

Southern Real Estate Group, LLC
Southern Real Estate Group, LLC, owned by Regan Tanner, celebrated their grand opening and ribbon cutting on Thursday, May 24 at 11:45 a.m. Those attending the event were treated to a delicious catered luncheon prepared by Marguerite McKinnon Catering.
Southern Real Estate Group is located at 110 South Grady Avenue in Douglas, Ga. In addition to Regan, broker & owner of the agency, Tina Bullock, Lacy Clements, Aida Mendoza, Tom Rice and Tim Thomason are ready to assist you with all of your real estate needs. Give them a call today at 912-383-7734.

Tax Services of South Georgia
Tax Services of South Georgia, located at 806 South Madison Avenue in Douglas, celebrated its grand opening and ribbon cutting on Thursday, January 10 with friends, family and community leaders in attendance. Owner Stephanie Paulk and her fiancé, Shawn Knight, were joined by Pastor Bob Powell of The Sanctuary who shared Scripture and led the group in prayer to ask for God’s blessings on the business. On behalf of the Chamber of Commerce, Lisa Hodge and Donny Bradshaw, along with City Commissioner Cindy McNeill, expressed appreciation for their investment in the community. Ms. McNeill also shared sentimental comments about the location as it was the same location her mother operated a sewing machine business for many, many years. Tax season is here and Tax Services of South Georgia is ready and able to assist Coffee County with their tax needs and financial planning. Stop by or give them a call at (912)592-3072.

SERVPRO
The Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce conducted a ribbon cutting for SERVPRO Restoration with franchise owner, Ryan Lavallee and Ericka Walker, Business Development Representative, on Tuesday, February 6. SERVPRO began in 1967 in California as a painting business by husband and wife team, Ted and Doris Issacon, and soon transformed into a franchise of cleanup and restoration specialist.
Within two years, they sold their first franchise and today have more than 1700 nationwide with corporate headquarters now in Tennessee. With a long history of consistent awards and recognition from highly respected sources such as Dunn and Bradstreet, Success Magazine, Wall Street Journal, CNN Money, and Forbes, SERVPRO has consistently ranked #1 in restoration services by Entrepreneur Magazine since 2004.
South Georgia State College recently released a new strategic plan covering the years 2019-2024. Entitled Moving Forward, the plan is built on the college’s legacy and articulates key goals for the next five years. Commitment to strengthen the economic health of the region remains one of its core goals. The commitment comes in many forms—from providing strong academic programs delivered by talented faculty and staff to establishing and maintaining relationships through collaborations with our community and region.

According to a recent study released by the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia’s Terry College of Business, SGSC’s economic impact on the region is significant. Students, faculty, staff, alumni and visitors, contributed more than $68 million in total economic impact to the college’s service area for fiscal year 2017 (July, 2016 through June, 2017). This area includes Coffee, Atkinson, Bacon, Jeff Davis, Ware, Pierce, Brantley and Clinch counties. During fiscal year 2017, SGSC’s total employment impact was recorded at 806 on-and off-campus jobs.

“We are fortunate to be in a region where postsecondary education is valued,” says Dr. Ingrid Thompson-Sellers, SGSC president. “This study confirms our investment in the community—one which benefits all stakeholders, and in turn, improves the economic strength of our region. As the college and the region grow stronger, everyone benefits.”

The college currently offers 19 pathways leading to Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees. Bachelor of Science degrees in Biological Sciences (BSBS), Management (BSM) and Nursing (BSN) are now joined by the addition of a Bachelor of Science in Education and Long-term Healthcare Management, as well as a Bachelor of Arts in Professional Business and Technical Writing. Offering these advanced degrees provides more choices for students who may choose to remain in the area after they graduate. SGSC’s faculty, staff and students remain dedicated to the community. Their support extends beyond campus boundaries, as they perform service projects with local businesses, host school groups for fun events and engage educational partners in additional co-curricular events.

As we expand our footprint within our community, both the college community and the local community benefit in ways that enhance each other, adds Dr. Sellers. “Fostering a culture of engagement between our SGSC community and the community at large, contributes to strong economic sustainability for each.”

The Selig Annual Report, which also showcases the economic impact of the University System of Georgia (USG) statewide, revealed a $16.8 billion impact during the same timeframe. The full study with data is available here: https://www.usg.edu/assets/usg/docs/news_files/USG_Impact_2017_%28November_2018%29.pdf
Wiregrass chosen as charter institution for academic advising program

Wiregrass Georgia Technical College is proud to announce that the college has been selected to participate in the charter cohort of the Excellence in Academic Advising comprehensive advising strategic planning process. Created jointly by NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising and the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, Excellence in Academic Advising establishes the aspirational standards for institutions to evaluate and improve academic advising, and acknowledge the central role of advising in promoting student learning, success, and completion.

In this first year, Wiregrass will partner with an Excellence in Academic Advising Fellow who will guide the school through an institution-wide, evidence-based decision making, planning, and implementation process to improve its academic advising efforts. Using EAA’s nine “Conditions of Excellence in Academic Advising,” Wiregrass Tech will refine, validate, and establish the standards or benchmarks to guide a reflective self-study and strategic assessment of academic advising.

“Participating in the EAA process is a momentous opportunity for Wiregrass,” shared Dr. Jammie Wilbanks, Associate Vice President for Academic Success for Wiregrass. “We will have the opportunity to systematically look at student data for the past 8-10 years to enhance student success going forward. We will help establish global academic advising standards. Academic advising does not happen in silos; it takes the entire college to guide students to success. This process will afford us the opportunity to look at advising in The ARC (Advising and Retention Center), as well as advising at Wiregrass holistically. This is exciting as it will bring together the entire college for the benefit of each individual student.”

The Wiregrass’ ARC provides students with the opportunity to meet with a professional advisor for the purpose of gaining assistance in planning their educational career, learning needed skills for academic success, and learning how to access the variety of resources and services available to them on the campus. The ARC is responsible for all first-term, pre-program Allied Health, Associate of Science, Criminal Justice, Early Childhood Care and Education, and Culinary Arts students. The ARC also advises all Technical and Industrial and Professional Services students their first term, and all Business Education and Computers Science students up to 60% of program completion. The ARC has seven full-time, and three part-time advisors.

In addition to Wiregrass Tech, 11 other institutions from across the country were selected from a large pool of applicants with various advising structures. This charter cohort represents a range of two-year and four-year institutions, including small liberal arts colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, large, online, four-year regional and state institutions, as well as both online and on campus institutions. The ARC at Wiregrass will soon be advising current students for Spring Semester. The new semester classes will begin January 9, 2019. New students can apply for Spring Semester and have their application fee waived on Free Application Day, November 8. For more information about programs offered or how to apply for Wiregrass Tech, visit www.wiregrass.edu.

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- Jimmy Kitchens, American Truck Parts, Inc.

Wiregrass.edu
South Georgia State College (SGSC) is one step closer to offering its Bachelor of Science in Long-Term Healthcare Management degree. With the recent approval by SGSC’s accreditation agency, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), the program is anticipated to launch in the fall semester of 2019. The University System of Georgia’s Board of Regents approved the degree in the spring. The B.S. in Long-Term Healthcare Management will develop educational skills and knowledge for managers of long-term healthcare provided in patient residences and long-term care facilities. It will focus on serving the aging, as well as individuals of any age who suffer from debilitating physical and mental disorders. The program curriculum and training experiences address a variety of healthcare concepts and practices, such as adult health, aging, developmental disabilities across the lifespan, acute care, subacute care, chronic disease management, psychiatric issues, mental health, disease management, health promotion, and health restoration. The program also focuses on leadership, organizational structure, human resources management strategies, operations management, finance, health law, marketing, communication, and decision-making. Additionally, students gain an increased understanding and knowledge of quality healthcare systems relating to quality assurance, risk management, managed care, insurance, ethics, and other information and practices important to managing in a demanding healthcare environment. Graduates of this program will have the skill to coordinate care among interdisciplinary health care professionals, community agencies, and long-term care facilities, all of which will increase quality of life and improve long-term outcomes. To be housed in and administered by the SGSC School of Nursing, the program will be taught by School of Nursing and healthcare management faculty.

South Georgia State College is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges to award associate and baccalaureate degrees. Contact the Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097 or call 404-679-4500 for questions about the accreditation of South Georgia State College.

School system completes five-year strategic plan

The Coffee County School System recently participated in a strategic planning process in partnership with Ford Next Generation Learning (FNGL). With the initial planning started in August of 2017, the final product was completed in June of 2018. The strategic plan will provide a focus for the district’s work to support the mission of Destination Graduation for College, Career, and Life and the vision of creating a stronger community through an equitable and excellent education for every student over the next five years. Partnering with FNGL brought a unique and comprehensive community approach to the process to increase community prosperity shared by all; a strengthened talent pipeline; young people prepared for college careers, lifelong learning and leadership; educational equity and justice for all; and the capacity for all students to contribute and go further. FNGL infuses high expectations and academic rigor of college preparatory academic programs with real-world relevance and rigor of career and technical education. Students choose from among career academies across a variety of sectors that drive economic growth in the community.

The planning process was initially started by holding a community conversation with approximately 75 participants including business leaders, teachers, parents, students and other stakeholders. The purpose was to ensure that the school district understood the vision that the Coffee County community has for the school system now and in the future. Conversations were held with students at the high school and middle school level, business and industry, city and county elected officials, the faith community, South Georgia State College and Wiregrass Georgia Technical College.

The system also spoke with parent and school advisory councils, the superintendent’s teacher advisory council, other individuals and groups to share the plan as it evolved and receive feedback. The four Focus Areas that the district has established are Teaching and Learning, which prepares students with strong academic and technical skills foundations. Workforce and Life, which purposefully prepares the students with the skills to navigate life beyond graduation. People and Culture, which provides a welcoming environment and positive culture for students and employees. Family and Community, which engages families, community members, and civic organization as active partners. Financial responsibility will be infused in all areas.

“With the plan completed, now the work begins,” stated Dr. Morris Leis, during a recent celebratory luncheon with key stockholders. “We are so appreciative of everyone that contributed to the finished product. It takes all of us working together for the success of our students. We are now ready to implement our plan.”
**Tommy Ponsell named Wiregrass’s Instructor of the Year**

Wiregrass Georgia Technical College Commercial Truck Driving Instructor Tommy Ponsell, received the 2019 Rick Perkins Award for Excellence in Technical Instruction, also known as Rick Perkins Instructor of the Year Award.

The Rick Perkins Award for Excellence in Technical Instruction is awarded annually. This award is designed to recognize and honor technical college instructors who make significant contributions to technical education through innovation and leadership in their fields. Instructors are nominated for the Rick Perkins Award by their peers. Competition among instructors occurs at the college, regional, and state levels.

Four finalists participated in the interviews. They were: Toby Heard (Auto Technology Instructor- Valdosta Campus), Jennifer Ray (Radiologic Technology Program Coordinator – Valdosta Campus), Tommy Ponsell (Commercial Truck Driving Program Coordinator- Coffee Campus), and Janet “Rainy” Rasmussen – Commercial Truck Driving Instructor).

Ponsell was nominated by his peers throughout the college. He is described as “committed to his students and ensures an adequate workforce for the region. He has shown commitment and dedication to Wiregrass and to our communities for many years. He will be an excellent instructor of the year.” Ponsell is credited to having started the truck driving program at the college and his students have consistently passed the CDL driving exam with 100 percent pass rate. He is sought out for his instructional technique and methodology.

Ponsell shared, “My goal as an instructor is to not only teach students a particular set of skills, but to also help open doors to brighter futures. I believe that teaching positive work ethics not only helps to serve the students, but their community as well. I want the transportation industry to be proud of not only the skills that our students possess, but professional attitudes as well.”

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**Nikki Hinson named Wiregrass’s GOAL winner**

After two rounds of interviews Nikki Hinson, a Radiologic Technology student, was named Wiregrass Georgia Technical College’s 2019 Georgia Occupational Award of Leadership (GOAL) winner. A family tragedy first sparked Nikki’s interest in the medical field. “My mom was involved in a head-on collision which resulted in breaking most of the bones in her body”, shared Nikki. “The event was also my first look into the world of medicine as I watched doctors and techs and all sort of equipment see inside my mother’s body to diagnose and treat her.” Nikki’s mother would eventually recover and Nikki married and became a busy mom with two little boys. As her life was falling into place, she found that she still wanted to return to school.

Nikki enrolled at Wiregrass Tech, and through her own research found the program that peaked her interest, Radiologic Technology. Nikki was impressed with the college’s guarantee on graduates and knew employers would be intrigued by an applicant that was backed by a two-year guarantee. Since becoming a Wiregrass student, she is an active member of SkillsUSA and currently serves as the college’s chapter president. Nikki was a member of the SkillsUSA team that earned gold medals at both state and national levels last summer. She also serves as Secretary for the Student Government Association.

GOAL, a statewide program of the Technical College System of Georgia, honors excellence in academics and leadership among the state’s technical college students. Local GOAL winners are selected at each of the state’s 22 technical colleges as well as one Board of Regents college with a technical education division.

Hinson competed against 24 nominees from Wiregrass’ four campuses in Valdosta, Douglas, Fitzgerald, and Sparks before being named as one of the top four nominees, and now college winner. The runners-up were: James Grobsmith, Barbering; Chris Rampley, Radiologic Technology; and Joshua Velasquez, Air Conditioning Technology.

Nikki was nominated by her Radiologic Technology Instructor, Jennifer Ray. “I nominated Nikki because she is an exemplary student who not only excels in the Radiologic Technology program, but also demonstrates leadership and decision-making skills through her involvement in various student organizations.” shared Ray. Hinson will now advance to regional judging in late February. In April, she will learn if she is one of the nine state finalists at the State GOAL Awards ceremony in Atlanta. A panel of leaders from the business, industry and government sectors will interview the finalist and choose one to be the 2019 State GOAL winner and the recipient of the GOAL medallion. The grand prize also includes a new car, courtesy of KIA, the statewide corporate sponsor of the GOAL program.

Nikki shared, “I am so honored to be our local GOAL winner! I am thankful for the overwhelming support that I have received and for the opportunity to represent Wiregrass at regions. This award represents my academic achievements as well as my character, and to be chosen as the student best fit to represent such an incredible Technical College is humbling to say the least. I look forward to future competitions and, God willing, future victories!”
The Coffee County School System has been named 2018 Charter System of the Year. The announcement came on Wednesday, Oct. 3, 2018, at the Charter System Foundation awards luncheon in Athens.

Lieutenant Governor Casey Cagle hosted the 4th Annual Charter System Foundation Awards Luncheon, in the Classic City, highlighting the numerous achievements of Georgia Charter Systems. Coffee County Schools was also awarded a $10,000 grant by the Georgia Association of Realtors to further enhance their reforms.

Dr. Morris Leis, Superintendent of Coffee County Schools, accepted the award and shared his appreciation to the students of Coffee County, teachers and staff, parents, community members, school governance councils, business partners and the Coffee County Board of Education for their hard work over the past five years. “It takes all of us working together for the success of our students,” Dr. Leis stated.

During the first five years of charter status, the school district has experienced success in many areas. The development and opening of the Wiregrass Regional College and Career Academy that offers blended virtual learning and dual enrollment through Wiregrass Technical College and South Georgia State College, the opening of the first Boys and Girls Club of Coffee County through a 21st Century Grant, and STEAM Summer Internships to name just a few.

The 2018 graduation rate for the Coffee County Schools reached the highest level ever, 82.8% which is above the state average. The graduating class of 2018 was the largest in school history with 485 students. The class comprised of 86 honor graduates, 33 Zell Miller Scholars, 243 Advanced Placement students, and 44% HOPE Scholarship eligible.

The Charter System of the Year Award recognizes a system that has demonstrated excellence in leadership, governance, partnerships and achievement. Coffee County has used their substantial flexibility to elevate their vision for their school system. Specifically, flexibility with personnel and staffing, scheduling, and expenditure controls. As an example, in an effort to retain and recruit quality educators the district has created its own salary schedule for certified staff that exceeds the state.

Coffee County is one of 45 Georgia charter systems across the state representing county and city school systems. Every charter school district is as diverse as the students they educate from Fulton County as the largest with Taliaferro County as the smallest. As a charter system, the district is given flexibility to be creative and innovative to better meet the needs of the students. In exchange, the district has increased accountability which the district continues to meet.

As the Charter System of the Year for 2018, Coffee County was selected from the following list of nominees that were considered for the Charter System Leadership Award or Georgia Charter System of the Year: Atlanta Public Schools, Baldwin County Schools, Barrow County Schools, Calhoun City Schools, Coffee County Schools, Dougherty County Schools, Dublin City Schools, Floyd County Schools, Fulton County Schools, Lumpkin County Schools, and Morgan County Schools.

Of Georgia’s 180 school systems, 45 have been approved as Charter Systems by the State Board of Education. Georgia Charter Systems have proven effective in addressing the specific and unique needs of individual school systems, embarking on new relationships between each board of education and their communities.
School system wins bronze at Golden Radish Awards

The Coffee County School System won Bronze recognition at the 2018 Golden Radish Awards held at the Georgia Freight Depot. The Golden Radish Award publicly recognizes Georgia school districts for best practices in farm to school programs, such as local food procurement, exposing students to new foods through taste tests and incorporating gardening and cooking activities in curriculum.

Coffee County School System received kudos for their work: Locally grown food was served on the school menu every day; Elementary school students were invited to attend a cooking class on kitchen skills where they learned to make parfaits, pizza, and quesadillas. Each student went home with an easy recipe book and a basket of cooking tools, excited to cook for their families; The School Nutrition Department, Principles, Walmart Distribution Managers, Farm Supply Company and the City of Douglas came together for the farm to school training.

The Coffee County School System was one of 84 Georgia School Districts recognized at the awards. Collectively, these districts served more than 1.3 million students a whopping 109 million school meals with locally grown food items during the 2017-18 school year.

Sherri Berry named Principal of the Year

Coffee Middle School principal Sherri Berry has been named Principal of the Year by the Georgia Association of Secondary School Principals. Last month, the GASSP announced that she was one of six finalists for the award. Tuesday, Feb. 20, Berry learned that the association had named her the top principal of the year. Berry will now represent Georgia in the competition for National Principal of the Year sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Mrs. Berry has been the principal of Coffee Middle School for the past seven years. Under her leadership, Coffee Middle School has exceeded the state average in test scores for the past three years. In addition to Coffee Middle School, Mrs. Berry served on the campus of Nicholls Elementary for 10 years. She was the Assistant Principal for Instruction for six years and served four years as the school’s principal.

Mrs. Berry is an alumnus of Coffee High, South Georgia College and Valdosta State University where she earned her Bachelor of Science and Masters of Education in Early Childhood Education and Educational Specialist in Educational Leadership. Mrs. Berry has participated in the Professional Association of Georgia Educators’ Principal Leadership Network for several years. She also represented Coffee County on three different GLISI Teams, serving as Leadership Performance Coach. Mrs. Berry is completing her 31st year in education having begun her career with Coffee County Schools serving as a teacher at West Green Elementary. She has also taught on the campuses of Indian Creek Elementary and Satilla Elementary.

Mrs. Berry is married to Mr. Michael Berry, agriculture teacher at Coffee High, who is also an educator of 31 years. She and Michael have two sons, Kody and Dake.
Dr. Ingrid Thompson-Sellers inaugurated as SGSC president

South Georgia State College celebrated the next chapter in the life of the 112-year-old institution September 17-21, 2018, with a week-long inauguration celebration, culminating with the installation of Dr. Ingrid Thompson-Sellers as the eighth president of the college.

Inauguration Week festivities kicked off on the Douglas and Waycross Campuses with a “Good Morning SGSC!” breakfast for students, faculty and staff, followed by an international “Taste of Culture” food-fest sponsored by the Cultural Exchange Club at both locations. The live band karaoke event in Douglas and zip lining in Waycross were popular and fun activities for students, faculty, and staff alike.

More than 275 people packed Peterson Hall’s McGourik Auditorium on September 21 for the Investiture Ceremony, heralded by an academic procession of college delegates and SGSC’s faculty, adorned in colorful regalia. Student and alumni representatives participated in the academic procession led by Dr. Molly Smith, professor of biology, and Ms. Sara Selby, professor of English and academic affairs project specialist, serving as mace bearers.

A prelude of musical selections by Ms. Tania Myers, followed by Mr. Steve Myers and a brass ensemble, opened the program. The Myers represent Coffee High School’s Fine Arts department. The combined Coffee High School/SGSC Chorus performed the National Anthem, and the Coffee High School Naval Junior ROTC Color Guard presented the colors.

Grand Marshall Dr. Robert Page, vice president for academic and student affairs, welcomed Atlantic-based Reverend Toni Belin Ingram from Greater Turner Chapel AME to provide the invocation. Mr. James M. Hull, University System of Georgia Board of Regents chairman; The Honorable Tyler Harper, Georgia State Senator, District 7; Mr. John Knox, Mayor of Waycross; Ms. Lisa Hodge, executive vice president of the Douglas/Coffee County Chamber of Commerce; Dr. Anissa Lokey Vega, Ph.D., graduate studies colleague and Mr. Michael Thompson, Dr. Thompson-Sellers’ brother, brought greetings.

After a musical interlude by Douglas native John Glosson, accompanied on piano by Jay Beverly, greetings continued from college representatives including Mr. Chris Tuten, past president, SGSC Foundation; Mr. Frank Pridemore, chairperson, SGSC Faculty Assembly; Ms. LaToya Curtis, chairperson, SGSC Staff Council; Ms. Tammy Flowers, president, Waycross Student Government Association and Mr. Shane Shook, alumnus.

University System of Georgia Chancellor Dr. Steve Wrigley provided the official presidential charge, presenting Dr. Thompson-Sellers with the college medallion.

Expressing her appreciation to many who made the trip from as far away as Jamaica and Canada, Dr. Thompson-Sellers applauded faculty, staff, students, trustees, elected officials and community partners for their dedication to the institution and for their ongoing support. She focused her presidential address on the themes of college access and affordability, growing academic support services for students and enhancing community partnerships.

“I have seen firsthand how education has influenced every aspect of my life, and I want to see that cycle continue for our region,” she said.

Dr. Thompson-Sellers shared several inspiring stories about individuals whose efforts continue to make an indelible mark on the lives of students; Ms. Sandra Adams, SGSC residence life and housing coordinator, recently initiated a scholarship endowment to expand students’ experiences abroad; Ms. Joanne Lewis, who assists families in overcoming substance abuse at Still Water Outreach, created a scholarship to help these individuals whose efforts continue to make an indelible mark on the lives of students; Ms. Sandra Adams, SGSC residence life and housing coordinator, recently initiated a scholarship endowment to expand students’ experiences abroad; Ms. Joanne Lewis, who assists families in overcoming substance abuse at Still Water Outreach, created a scholarship to help these individuals return to college; Ms. Tammy Flowers, a mom and non-traditional student, still finds time to mentor others as she completes her nursing degree.

According to Dr. Thompson-Sellers, South Georgia State College has deep roots in this community and region. “The students who attend SGSC are our lifeblood, and what we do makes the college a viable, attractive and utterly irreplaceable option for them. I am humbled and honored to chart the future for this great institution,” she said.

Dr. Thompson-Sellers ended her address by sharing ways education can change a life and the need for each of us to give back. “Ms. Sandra Adams heard this call. Ms. Joanne Lewis heard this call. Ms. Tammy Flowers heard this call. It is now our turn to answer the call, and I have complete faith that THIS community will do just that,” she concluded.

The Investiture Ceremony ended by singing the college Alma Mater before the benediction, given by Dr. Carl McDonald, vice president for academic affairs, emeritus, retrieval of the colors and a reception at the South Georgia State College Alumni House.

To showcase SGSC’s fall athletic teams, the Hawks held a basketball scrimmage, and the Lady Hawks soccer team celebrated with a tailgate before their game on Friday afternoon.

As a way to give back to the communities served by SGSC, several outreach activities were performed by faculty, staff and students during Inauguration Week. These included serving as a Den Leader for Webelos Cub Scout Den Pack 227, volunteering with the Hope Center Afterschool Program and donating eight new backpacks to the Hope Center, hosting a school supply drive to help children in Valdosta and Americus at SGSC’s entry program sites, volunteering at a church as a teacher and audiovisual technician, reading to children at the Hazzard Hill Early Head Start Program, collecting 30 books for the Kiwanis Club’s Books for Inmates Project and collecting luggage/bags from both campuses for the Kiwanis Club of Waycross.

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South Georgia State College would like to express its appreciation to the SGSC Foundation, the James M. Dye Foundation, Aladdin Food Management Services, Coffee High Naval Junior ROTC Color Guard, Creative Printing, Standard Press, the Inauguration planning committee and South Georgia State College student ambassadors and volunteers for their instrumental support in helping make the event a success.
Greta Grantham named systemwide Teacher of the Year

Indian Creek Elementary School’s Greta Grantham is the Coffee County School System’s 2018-2019 Teacher of the Year. Mrs. Grantham was named Teacher of the Year at the school system’s annual convocation meeting, which took place on Thursday, Aug. 9 at Coffee Middle School.

The system announced teachers of the year from each individual school at the end of last school year. A short press release issued by Indian Creek at the end of last school year had this to say about Mrs. Grantham: “Mrs. Grantham teaches kindergarten and is always willing to go the extra mile not only for her students, but for everyone at ICE. She is involved in many activities such as the Character Education program, Math Club, and Creek Choir. Many, many thanks to Mrs. Grantham for all she does for ICE.”

Teachers have been back at work all week. School opens tomorrow – Friday, Aug. 10 – for the 2018-2019 year.

Wiregrass Georgia Technical College Pharmacy Technology program ranked #4 in Georgia

Wiregrass Georgia Technical College has learned that the Pharmacy Technology program is ranked #4 in Georgia and #15 in the nation. This ranking was announced by the Pharmacy Technician Guide. The guide ranks colleges that are ASHP/ACPE Accredited, and all accredited pharmacy technician programs in the United States were reviewed. The review was based on which accredited programs provided students with the best learning experiences.

Pharmacy Technology at Wiregrass is a diploma program and qualifies for the HOPE Career Grant. If students qualify for the HOPE or Zell Miller Grants, they could be eligible for additional money to pay for fees, books, or tuition. The program accepts students each semester and is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE), and American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP). The program has an in-field job placement rate of 100 percent.

The Pharmacy Tech program has added approximately $80,000 in brand-new technology in the past several years. The program has added a Parata dispensing cabinet and the Kirby Lester Plus, both are highly used equipment in the retail pharmacy environment that provides safety to medication dispensing. The Auto Print is a unit dosing machine that is used in hospital or institutional pharmacy settings. “The addition of the updated technology elevates the Pharmacy Technology graduate skill set to be employable in all facets of pharmacy settings,” shared Frank Barnett, Pharmacy Technology Program Coordinator. The program accepts new students every other semester with the next class acceptance set for Fall 2018. The students can complete the diploma program in three semesters once they are finished with their core class requirements.
Wiregrass Georgia Technical College students attend 54th annual SkillsUSA National Leadership and Skills Conference

Wiregrass Georgia Technical College students attended the 54th Annual SkillsUSA National Leadership and Skills Conference held recently in Louisville, KY. More than 6,300 students competed in 102 different trade, technical and leadership fields. Students worked against the clock and each other, proving their expertise in occupations such as electronics, auto collision, precision machining, medical assisting and culinary arts. All competitions are designed, run and judged with the help of industry, trade associations, labor organizations and test competencies are set using industry standards.

Top student winners received gold, silver and bronze medallions. Many also received prizes such as tools of their trade or scholarships to further their career and education. The SkillsUSA Championship is for high-school and college-level students who are members of the 360,000-member SkillsUSA organization. Wiregrass received the most medals (10) and the most gold medals (4), among Georgia colleges. The state of Georgia was number two in the nation for medal count, at 82.

Wiregrass Auto Collision Repair student Johnathan Wolfe (Adel) won a gold medal in Collision Repair Technology. In the Community Service Competition, Wiregrass Radiology students Bridget Crudden (Valdosta), Amber Parton (Lakeland), and Blake Royals (Nashville) won Gold. The team presented the Tiaras and Ties project which not only helped them win the top in the nation but also receive an award from the Georgia State Director for the highest team score, a perfect 1,000, among Georgia contestants.

Winning Silver medals for the Promotional Bulletin Board Competition were: Emily Anderson (Valdosta), Nikki Hinson (Valdosta), and ShaDawn Powell (Lake Park).

Winning Bronze medals were Kellie Tucker (Fitzgerald) in Medical Terminology, and David Orr (Valdosta) in Barbering. Kellie was the recipient of an award from the Georgia State Director for the highest individual score, 98, among Georgia contestants.

The Wiregrass Skills Chapter was also recognized at the National Competition as a National Model of Excellence Chapter. Wiregrass Welding student Morgan Davis (Hahira), and Cosmetology student Amber Brown (Sparks) represented the college’s chapter. Wiregrass was one of 24 nationwide to be recognized for the chapter’s work this past year.

Wiregrass was recognized by the National SkillsUSA Director, the Vice-President from Lowe’s Companies Inc., Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin, and U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos.

For the first time ever, nitrogen plastic welding was introduced as part of the competition for the Collision Repair Technology competition at National SkillsUSA. This new technology allows one to weld plastic back together as if it’s never been damaged. After being taught this technique by instructors at Wiregrass, Johnathan Wolfe was able to stand out among competitors earning him a score of 95 percent on this one technique that helped him earn the top spot in the nation as the gold winner overall. “It felt great knowing that not only did I perform at my best, but knowing that I wouldn’t be where I am without the support of all the amazing instructors and mentors at Wiregrass,” shared Wolfe. “I’m very thankful for everyone that supported me and believed in me. What I did was a very big deal for my career.” Wiregrass purchased the new technology equipment last year to teach all students in the Auto Collision Repair program this new technique.

All of Wiregrass competitors earned the Skill Point Certificate, part of the Work Force Ready System. The criterion is developed and endorsed by industry representatives and signifies students who have achieved technical competencies and proficiencies on the national level.

Wiregrass was also represented in the following competitions: 3-D Visualization and Animation – Geremey Brantley (Valdosta) and Darren Lewis (Valdosta); CNC Milling – John Lake (Valdosta); Computer Programming – Andrew Singley (Tifton); Automotive Refinishing – Tae Anderson (Fitzgerald); and Model of Excellence/SkillsUSA Chapter representatives – Morgan Davis (Hahira), Olivia Gilliland (Hahira), Michael Horn (Fitzgerald), and Emily Davis (Hahira).

“Being a member of SkillsUSA is a wonderful experience for all involved, and a great opportunity for students to build workplace skills, as well as hone their technical skills for competition,” said Kelley Wetherington, Campus Life Coordinator. “We have some amazing students who worked hard and represented us well. Not only did our students work hard, so did our instructors, going above and beyond to prepare our students for their competitions. In addition to their coursework and preparing for competition, students and advisors dedicated over 2000 hours of work on community service-related projects this past year, which earned us the honor of being chosen as a National Models of Excellence Chapter. “We are very proud of all of our students for representing Wiregrass Georgia Tech and the state of Georgia at the state and national levels.”

SkillsUSA is a partnership of students, teachers and industry representatives working together to ensure America has a skilled workforce. It is a national nonprofit organization serving teachers, high school and college students who are preparing for careers in trade, technical and skills service occupations, including health occupations. The SkillsUSA program hosts local, state, and national competition for students to showcase their skills learned through hands-on training in the classroom.
2018 GCAA Region 17 championship and earns spot in the NJCAA National Tournament in Utah

The SGSC Hawks softball team finished the season with a 33-18 overall record and a 20-8 record in Georgia Collegiate Athletics Association (GCAA) play. The Hawks were the second seed going into the GCAA Region 17 tournament in Cartersville. They lost their first game of the tournament and went on to win four in a row to claim the championship. Logan Mullis, Tess Robinson and Larran Carter were named First team All-Region. Destiney McRae was named to the second team. Logan Mullis was named GCAA Player of the Year. In addition, the Hawks had 6 players named to the GCAA All-Academic team. They are Logan Mullis, Michaelin Thomas, Jess Kifferly, Kelsey Davis, Abbi Lewis and Tess Robinson.

By virtue of winning the GCAA, the Hawks qualified for the NJCAA National Tournament in St. George, Utah. The Hawks represented themselves well but fell to the number one ranked team in the nation, Florida Southwestern by a score of 5-1. In the loser’s bracket, the Hawks lost to Howard College in a hard fought game with a final score of 8-5.

Swimming: SGSC

Hawks men and women

swim teams earn second place in the nation at NJCAA swim meet, Coach CM Jenkins named Women’s National Coach of the Year

The South Georgia State College swim team notched two more national runner-up awards at the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) swim meet held in Fort Pierce, Fla. SGSC women’s team earned their third consecutive second place finish in the nation while the men repeated their runner-up spot from 2016. The host school, Indian River, won their 47th consecutive National Championship.

Head Coach CM Jenkins was also named Women’s National Coach of the Year and individually, the team had several top eight finishes and set five new school records. Jessilyn Graham set a new record in the 50 breaststroke with a fourth place finish and a time of 31.41. Men’s breaststroker Andrew Brown also set a new team record in the 200 breast with a third place finish and a time of 2:06.41. Brown also placed second in the 50 and 100 breaststroke events. Jessica Dunton had two second place finishes during the meet. The sophomore bested her old record in the 200 fly with a 2:09.21 time and placed second in the 400 IM. Distance swimmers Brittany Herndon and Daniel Johnson also set new marks for the Hawks. Johnson broke the five year old record in the 1650, a mile long freestyle event with a time of 16:40, earning him third place. Herndon bested her old 1000 freestyle record with a time of 10:51.

All five members of the Hawks distance group, led by assistant Coach Sarah Maley, earned top eight places in the 1650. Along with Johnson’s third place finish, freshman Andrew Woith finished fourth and fellow freshman Steven Smith had a huge time cut to finish in eighth place. Herndon also finished third in the mile with freshman female Casey Hall right behind her in fourth place.

The Hawks also amassed a huge amount of points in the 200 butterfly event. Along with Jessica Dunton’s second place, freshmen swimmers Lindsey Garrison and Abigail Aldridge placed third and sixth, respectively. SGSC had four men score in the event, Jackson Bloom (6th), Michael Thompson (7th), Trace Austin (9th) and Elijah Harris (11th).

The Hawks men had four second place relay finishes during the meet. Both 200 and 400 medley teams of Ryan Buczkowski, Andrew Brown, Jackson Bloom and Zac Elz earned runner-up spots to Indian River. The 200 free relay team, made up of the same four swimmers, took second again and freshman Orion Bopp joined the group in the 400 free relay. The women had one runner-up relay finish. The 400 medley team of Casey

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Hall, Jessilyn Graham, Abigail Aldridge and Delaney Smith placed second.

**Basketball: SGSC Hawks Basketball Make the GCAA Semi-Finals Four Seasons in a Row**

South Georgia State Hawks (23-9, 11-5) finished with the 4th straight 20-plus win season and only 1 of 2 teams to make the GCAA semi-finals 4 seasons in a row. They finished 2nd in the GCAA, finished in the final NJCAA National Poll (Receiving Votes) Top 30 teams in the country, 1st in the NJCAA in assists per game by a team (22.8), 1st in the GCAA and 21st in the NJCAA in 3-pointers made, 1st in the GCAA and 29th in the NJCAA in 3-Point Percentage, 1st in the GCAA and 9th in the NJCAA in steals.

Four members of South Georgia State College’s men’s basketball team received postseason honors recently from the Georgia Collegiate Athletic Association (GCAA) during the 2017-2018 season.

Tracy Hector, Jr., a 6’5” redshirt sophomore from Mobile, Ala., was named to the GCAA’s All-Defensive Team. Hector averaged 8.7 points, 8.5 rebounds per game and 3.4 steals per game. He finished in the top five in offensive rebounds (92) and the top ten in total rebounds (206).

An additional GCAA All-Academic Award was presented to Louis and sophomore Willem Vermylen.

**Baseball: SGSC Baseball Secures the Most Wins in the GCAA, Coach Jeff Timothy Selected as GCAA Coach of the Year**

The South Georgia State College Hawks baseball team ended the season with the most wins in the Georgia Collegiate Athletic Association (GCAA), putting six players on the All-Conference team, and having both the Player of the Year and the Coach of the Year coming from its ranks.

The Hawks finished in an impressive second place in the GCAA conference tournament. After the tournament, three Hawks earned spots on the All-Conference First Team: outfielder Cole Escher, infielder Colby Owens, and pitcher Zach Mixon. The following Hawks were named Second Team All-Conference: fielders Jacob Giles and Tyler Salomon and pitcher Matt Mixon. Mainor was also named GCAA Player of the Year. Head coach Jeff Timothy, with a league-best 42 wins, took home Coach of the Year honors, the first of his career. Making the 2018 GCAA All-Tournament team were Mainor, Escher and Hassan Westbrook.

The Hawks were 2-2 in the conference tournament making the championship game. This is the 7th straight postseason appearance in Coach Timothy’s 7th season as the head coach (2018 GCAA Coach of the Year). The Hawks were led by Zach Mainor (12-3 record with 108 strikeouts, 2.25 ERA) GCAA Player of the Year and 1st team All-Conference; Cole Escher (.415 avg., 75 runs, 30 stolen bases) 1st team All-Conference; Colby Owens (.352 avg., 75 runs, 49 RBIs, 49 stolen bases) 1st team All-Conference; Jacob Giles (.324 avg., 44 RBIs, 29 stolen bases) 2nd team All-Conference; Tyler Salomon (.352 avg., 37 RBIs, 14 stolen bases) 2nd team All-Conference; and Mark Mixon (6-1 record, 92 strikeouts) 2nd team All-Conference.

**CROSS COUNTRY: SGSC’s Cross Country Teams Compete in GCAA Meets**

SGSC’s Cross Country teams continue to compete in both the men’s and women’s divisions in the GCAA. The fall schedule included meets at Middle Georgia State University, Georgia College and State University, Albany State University, and the Central Georgia Technical College Invitational. SGSC prides itself on helping runners achieve their potential both in the classroom and on the trails.

**SOCCER: SGSC’s Women’s Soccer Finished Fourth in the GCAA**

The women’s soccer team finished fourth in the GCAA for 2017-2018, with two players, Chelsea Green and Mackenzie Macmillan, selected to the all-conference teams. Green has committed to play with the NAIA program of Johnson and Wales in Miami for the remainder of her college career. The 2018-2019 season for women’s soccer is full of potential. Five current players will be returning to join a highly talented freshman class. Currently sixteen incoming players have been signed representing three states, eleven club organizations, and the Caribbean. SGSC will also be renovating Shannon Hall as a permanent field house for the women’s soccer team, including a team lounge, players’ locker room, coaches’ offices, and storage.
August 25, 2017, marked the beginning of a new era for South Georgia State College. An overflow crowd was on hand to celebrate and cut the ribbon, opening the recently completed renovations of Davis Hall, one of the college’s three original buildings on the Douglas Campus, and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Built in 1907, Davis Hall opened as a women’s dormitory, then converted to classroom space in the 1970s. Recognizing the historical significance of the building, the University System of Georgia Board of Regents approved a state-allocated $2.5 million major repair and renovation project. Allstate Construction oversaw the renovation, and with the assistance of architectural firm, Studio 8 Design, painstakingly preserved as much of the original architectural elements as possible: restoring wooden floors and bannisters, returning ceilings to their original height, and even uncovering and replacing original front portico windows which hadn’t been seen in decades.

In her opening remarks, SGSC president, Dr. Ingrid Thompson-Sellers said, “Oh, if only these walls could talk, they would perhaps tell us an interesting story of our history, legacy, leadership and vision.”

The renovation brings a variety of technology and layout changes to the space, which now offers enhanced teaching and learning experiences for SGSC students as well as increased utility efficiencies for the institution. A new lecture hall accommodates more than 150 students using state-of-the-art technology as a Technology Enable Active Learning (TEAL) classroom, and students will not have to go far to speak with faculty and staff who are now housed in 12 office spaces within the building.

On hand to show support for the college and celebrate the transformation of the building were Tricia Chastain, executive vice chancellor and Michael Miller, program manager and historic preservation officer from the University System of Georgia, Dominic LaRiccia representing Georgia’s District 169, senior executives from the construction and design firms, Andrea Taylor, past president of the Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Authority and SGSC’s Johnathon Mykal Lewis, SGA president, Douglas Campus.

Alumni including Dr. Jim Cottingham, whose father, Dr. Tom Cottingham, taught at the college, and Diana Smith Highsmith, daughter of former college president William S. Smith, reminisced about their time at the college and the experiences they shared while living in the dorms.

“I came to live in what I call the President’s apartment in the first floor right wing of Davis Hall with my family as a five year-old little girl in 1947,” said Highsmith. “At Christmas, Daddy would have the magnolia tree just outside our apartment covered with outdoor Christmas lights. It was a highlight for me; it was so beautiful, but nothing compared with homecoming! I only have happy memories of life in Davis Hall and the college campus.”

“The number of students seeking admission to the college is growing with the inclusion of traditional students attending both the Douglas and Waycross Campuses, Dual Enrollment students attaining college credit before high school graduation and non-traditional students taking online courses,” continued Thompson-Sellers.

“The legacy of Davis Hall began 110 years ago,” she concluded. “Since then, thousands of students have passed through these halls, in addition to other presidents and hundreds of faculty and staff. Today, our students have the opportunity to study in a safe space within a modern infrastructure that includes an enriched learning environment.”
On Thursday, Jan. 31, the Douglas-Coffee County Chamber of Commerce presented its community awards at the annual banquet. This year’s keynote speaker was Dr. John Snow, a former Secretary of the Treasury under President George W. Bush, who brought a unique perspective on economic challenges facing economies at the local, state, and national levels. Following Dr. Snow’s remarks, Brad Riner announced the Chamber’s award recipients. The winners are shown below.

**David Varnedore,**
the Gene Chambers Entrepreneur of the Year

**The Small Business Partner of the Year,**
Kayla Sellers and The Shoppes at Tip Top

**Industry Partner of the Year,**
Premium Waters

**Community Partner of the Year,**
the Coffee County School System

The Chamber of Commerce presented a new award this year, the Garland Thompson Lifetime Achievement Award. Pictured above are members of the late Garland Thompson’s family.

**Francis Lott,** the first recipient of the Garland Thompson Lifetime Achievement Award