

**Montgomery Advertiser Article
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**Envision 2020
Working Together Working Wonders**

Lynn Beshear, Executive Director

It has been eleven months since Envision 2020 conducted the first Regional Growth Conference in February 2004. Over 300 citizens, business leaders, government employees and developers relished in the new-found possibilities for literally creating a beautiful future for the River Region.

We learned that communities all over the country are setting design standards for residential and commercial development that serve the economy while reflecting the community's character. In Atlanta, for example, there are commercial offices that are fully occupied while less costly offices across the street stand vacant. Why? Simple things like a decorative fountain, trees and flowers. People are attracted to lovely, shaded places.

Likewise residential housing booms, both in the River Region and nationally, reflect a longing to return to walkable neighborhoods where families can know their neighbors and enjoy easy pedestrian access to shopping and entertainment. The classic example used repeatedly is Old Cloverdale. In other words, citizens and developers are going back to the best of the past and incorporating it into our future.

Envision has great news! Envision, in partnership with Faulkner University's Jones School of Law, is giving the River Region the opportunity to take our knowledge and visions several steps further in the planning and design arena. On February 10 and 11 the prestigious Seaside Institute will hold a Smart Growth Conference at the Jones School of Law. This conference is tailored primarily for professionals in planning and development, and Continuing Education Units will be awarded to attendees to the two-day event. National leaders in Smart Growth and the New Urbanism will be the speakers and workshop leaders. The bulk of the conference is technical and the second day will include working on design plans for two designated areas in the region.

February 2004 gave us a vision of possibilities and the fruits are already evident in current developments. February 2005 will boost greatly the knowledge, skills, vision and energy around planning for land use and development of the built environment. Indeed, the best is yet to come! For additional information and to register:

www.seasideinstitute.org

Task Force Updates

K-12 Public Education:

There is good news for public education in central Alabama! **The River Region Principals' and Teachers' Leadership Academy** has been created to provide a framework for professional development and collaboration of principals and teachers employed in the River Region. An additional academy goal will be to identify and train individuals who are committed to becoming school leaders in the future.

Envision 2020 task force volunteers and staff have worked with State Department of Education professionals and the region's superintendents and directors of curriculum to develop the Academy as the ongoing structure that will serve as a model for regional cooperation and leadership development for public school educators across the state. Principals and lead teachers will learn how to directly benefit their students by getting hands-on experience that can be applied immediately.

Federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation leads ultimately to developing and nurturing school leaders, and creation in the River Region of a strong pool of trained professionals dedicated to quality school leadership will serve as the backbone of region-wide efforts to insure excellence in student achievement.

Montgomery County Public Schools will host the first meeting for all River Region K-12 principals in late January and will focus on analysis of data and making the connection between data and the specific action steps needed to improve student achievement.

Tourism:

A great deal has been in the news recently about the tourism industry. This is just the sort of reports we need in the River Region where tourism is a multimillion-dollar a year business and where currently we are seeing only the tip of the iceberg. Recent news is that Prattville will host the BASS Open Championship in December 2005 and is in the running to once again host golf's Nationwide Tour Championship. Additionally, Macon and Elmore counties are seeing expansion of their gaming industries bringing new challenges and opportunities to central Alabama as well.

The **Tourism Task Force** has created the River Region Tourism Council, which is a coalition of tourism industry leaders from each county. The Council's role is to collaborate on editing, printing and distribution of the River Region Tourism map whose design was donated by LWT Communications in 2003 as part of their annual Create-A-Thon, with printing donated by Walker Printing and the Macon County Racing Commission. The map, featuring sixty-five of the region's several hundred tourist sites and attractions, was released initially in March 2004 and has been well received. The River Region Tourism Council will meet this month to update this important component of the central Alabama's tourism package.

Healthcare:

Healthcare providers and radio have joined forces to get important and life-saving information to the public. Heather Johnson, member of Envision's Healthcare Task Force, Director of Community Outreach for Community Hospital in Tallassee and President of the Board of the Tallassee Chamber of Commerce, has taken a leadership role with *Bodylove*, which is an innovative health education radio program. The Birmingham-based collaboration between medical professionals, actors and playwrights, which is funded in part by grants from the State Council on the Arts and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, *Bodylove* is a 15-minute "soap opera" format focused on health issues. Under Mrs. Johnson's leadership in Tallassee, *Bodylove* is available now on Radio 1300 WTLS. Plans by creators include new programs that will address depression screening and mental health. For more information about *Bodylove*, contact Linda Jenkins, Project Director, at the Envision office at 269-0224.

In Other Action:

The Montgomery Concert Society, under the direction of Royce and Debbie Richardson, is featuring Bruce Hornsby in Concert at the Davis Theater on Wednesday, February 16 at 7:30 p.m. Concert goers can attend a pre-concert reception, which is being generously hosted by Ted Nobles, owner of Nobles Restaurant, as well as have premier reserved seats for the concert as part of a contribution to Envision 2020. For tickets and information, call Royce Richardson at 260-0208.

How to get involved in Envision 2020

1. Call 269-0224 to sign up for a task force or arrange for a speaker.
2. Use the Envision Plan to guide activities and planning in all organizations.
3. Pick up a copy of the Envision 2020 Regional Tourism map and become a home-state tourist. It will be fun and educational!