

In the REGION

Local Government Services Offers Ideas for Wintertime Pandemic Adaptation

For the majority of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the everyday patterns of life throughout the country. In the northern U.S., the arrival of cold and inclement weather and reduction in daylight will push people indoors for a greater majority of each day. Southern Georgia has the advantage of relatively warmer wintertime temperatures although daylight is reduced, albeit to a lesser degree than experienced by those in more northern latitudes.

In addition to practicing physical distancing and wearing facemasks, continuing and even increasing outdoor activities during the upcoming colder weather and flu season is advised. The shelter-in-place order in Georgia took not only an economic toll, but also exacerbated mental health and substance abuse issues. If people spend more time outdoors this winter, they will not only be exposed to fresh air and sunshine but will also experience greater ventilation and



Pictured above: Georgia Olive Farms, Lakeland, GA (Photo credit ExploreGeorgia.org)

less cramped conditions than those experienced with shopping/dining indoors. Sunshine can be beneficial as well because an association has also been found between lower levels of Vitamin D and the risk of getting Covid-19.

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The Southern Georgia Regional Commission proudly serves Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Berrien, Brantley, Brooks, Charlton, Clinch, Coffee, Cook, Echols, Irwin, Lanier, Lowndes, Pierce, Tift, Turner, and Ware Counties.

Local Government Services

Local Government Services Offers Ideas for Wintertime Pandemic Adaptation (continued)

Some steps and best practices to encourage increased socialization and time spent outdoors include:

- Extend restaurant and retail downtown storefronts to accommodate outdoor seating and shopping areas, utilizing outdoor space heaters as necessary. Design elements can include the use of insulating materials such as straw bales or wood seating with blankets and pillows and the use of wind breaks. Avoiding metal furniture which makes for cold seating.
- Market farm days and farm/agritourism experiences can be theme and/or holiday based or can have a regional connection. Communities across separate geographies can link their themes and encourage cross promotion between and amongst their communities.
- Set up a wintertime market/village like the traditional open-air German Christkindl markets with pop-up shops and food trucks/stands. These markets typically include artisan craft products which make for unique holiday gifts alongside warming refreshments and foods– hot cider/hot chocolate, hot sandwiches, soups, kettle corn, and warm pretzels.
- Identify and utilize outdoor areas for public participation to the extent possible - public hearings can be held outdoors with a bit of advance preparation. Additional needs may include loudspeakers, tents, and accessible seating.
- Hold outdoor drive-in or walk up theater



Pictured above: Wine & Food Festival picture of Friendship Coffee Company (Photo credit ExploreGeorgia.org)



Pictured above: Wine & Food Festival picture of Big Green Egg (Photo credit ExploreGeorgia.org)

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Local Government Services

Local Government Services Offers Ideas for Wintertime Pandemic Adaptation (continued)

movies. These can also include themes such as a Hallmark Channel Christmas movie fest.

To thrive during the winter months, it is important to adapt to the situation the pandemic has placed our local businesses in – to the extent that creative and innovative solutions can be found and implemented quickly. Small businesses are the lifeblood of local communities and add to the local flavor and appeal of a community.

For additional details and localized assistance, SGRC Planning staff are available at (229) 333-5277.



Drive-in Theater, Jesup, GA (Photo credit ExploreGeorgia.org)

1. “Deciding to Go Out,” Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Updated September 11, 2020, accessed October 7, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/deciding-to-go-out.html>
2. “Unemployment,” Impact of COVID-19 on Georgia’s Economy, Georgia Tech Covid-19 Economic Research, accessed October 6, 2020, <https://gacovid19.org/category/unemployment/>
3. Allison Stevens, “‘I’m on my last rope’ COVID-19 strains Georgia mental health resources,” *Georgia Recorder*, April 23, 2020, <https://georgiarecorder.com/2020/04/23/im-on-my-last-rope-covid-19-strains-georgia-mental-health-resources/>
4. Gretchen Rubin, “Vitamin D deficiency may raise risk of getting Covid-19,” *At the Forefront*, UChicago Medicine, September 3, 2020, <https://www.uchicagomedicine.org/forefront/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/vitamin-d-deficiency-may-raise-risk-of-getting-covid19>

Transportation and Environmental

Transportation and Environmental Division Offers Regional Transit Update

At the beginning of FY2019, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) approached the Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC) about becoming a regional transit operator for all of Southern Georgia. This request was similar to subsequent recommendations of proposed legislation in the 2019-2020 State Legislature.

A regional transit system offers public transportation within a region for the benefit of increased access and mobility to its citizens. Regionalizing public transit leverages economies of scale while utilizing available funding sources to provide the matching funds needed to operate rural public transit services. Any of the Department of Human Services (DHS) or Medicaid trips may utilize a 5311-funded vehicle for transport, and act as a revenue source to offset local match requirements. This would allow residents to have improved access to resources such as education, employment, healthcare and other basic services available in other parts of the region. Currently, 11 of the 18 counties served by the SGRC have a 5311 rural public transportation system. All 18 counties have other transportation options under the DHS Coordinated Transportation program and Medicaid Non-Emergency Medical Transportation services.

The SGRC developed a Regional Transit Plan to serve as a guidebook, examining what a regional,

inter-county, public transportation system might look like. Last year, funding challenges meant that the SGRC could not pursue a regional transit program. However, after reevaluating proposed budgets and available revenue sources, the SGRC is looking to pursue a regional transit program beginning in FY2022.

The SGRC Council will vote in October to determine whether or not to submit a regional transit application to GDOT. If the application is approved by the SGRC Council, each county will need to pass a resolution to opt in or out of a regional system and commit to proportionally funding any shortfall in funding the SGRC might incur (the SGRC proposed budget does not include any funding shortfalls) during their November commission meetings. Upon acceptance of the application by GDOT, the SGRC will begin the process of securing a vendor to operate the regional public transit system.

SGRC staff has already started contacting county managers and elected officials to answer any questions they might have about the application process and what their role will be in a regional public transit program. Anyone with questions may contact Megan Fowler at mfowler@sgrc.us or at (229) 333-5277.

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Transportation and Environmental

Transportation and Environmental Division Offers Regional Transit Update (continued)



Pictured above: a participant gets a ride from a regional transit provider.

October

is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

The American Cancer Society says, "There is no sure-way to prevent breast cancer. But there are things you can do that might lower your risk."

See their website to learn more:

<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/breastcancer/risk-and-prevention.html>



Geographic Information Services

SGRC GIS Receives a 2020 NADO Impact Award

Each year the National Association of Development Organizations honors members who have exhibited creative and innovative problem solving and/or program delivery to advance regional community, economic development, and improve quality of life. The 2020 list of award recipients include 79 projects from 48 organizations, spanning 19 states across the nation.

This year, SGRC-GIS received the award for its “Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information HUB,” which disseminates information related to Coronavirus as quickly as possible and provides resources for businesses and the community at large. The hub is a one-stop shop for COVID-19

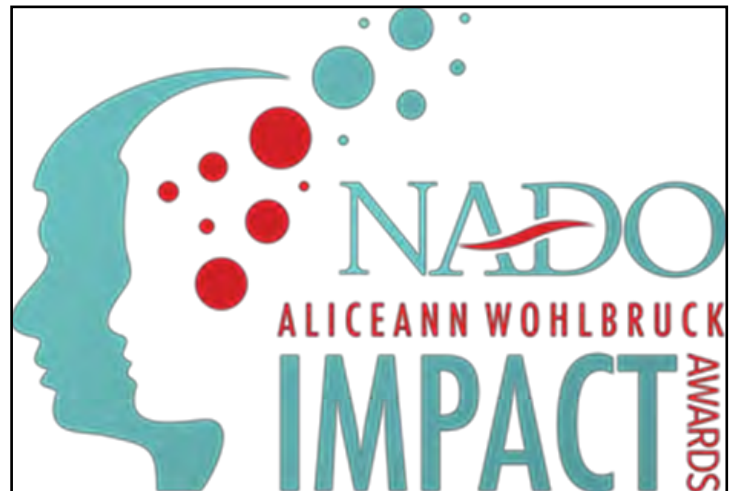
information including state ordinances, senior center locations and hours of operation, restaurants that are open or closed, and links to the Department of Public Health, the CDC, the GA Department of Education, GEMA, and the Governor’s Office.

The award focuses on the main HUB site, which then links to information specific web maps and resources from all partners. An image of the main HUB webpage can be seen in the lower picture on the right. The SGRC-GIS Coronavirus Information HUB can be found at:

<http://www.sgrcmaps.com/SGRC Covid19 Hub>.

A complete list of NADO award recipients can be found at: <https://www.nado.org/congratulations-to-the-2020-nado-impact-award-recipients/>.

For any questions about this project, or other GIS solutions, please contact Rachel Strom at rstrom@sgrc.us or (229) 333-5277 for more information.



Community and Economic Development

Bacon County is Awarded CDBG-EIP for Infrastructure Improvements to Assist Beach Timber

On September 17th, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs awarded a \$385,078 grant to Bacon County to construct much needed street paving and drainage improvements that will allow for the expansion of Beach Timber Company, Inc. Beach Timber is making a \$1.8 million private investment in building construction and machinery/equipment and has committed to the creation of 34 fulltime jobs. The successful CDBG-EIP grant application was written and submitted by the Southern Georgia Regional Commission. SGRC Community and Economic Development staff will administer the project.



Truck traffic at the entrance of Beach Timber is often severely congested, and this issue will only worsen due to the increased number of trucks resulting from the expansion. The new roadway will allow for safe access in and out of the growing sawmill.

Community and Economic Development

OneGeorgia Grant Awarded to Southeast Georgia Regional Development Authority

The SGRC recently assisted the Southeast Georgia Regional Development Authority (SGRDA), comprised of Appling, Bacon, Jeff Davis, and Pierce Counties, in securing a OneGeorgia Equity Grant for industrial park infrastructure improvements in the Pierce County Industrial Park. This project will provide the essential rail spur infrastructure that is needed for successful industrial recruitment and job creation that will benefit the 4-county region.

On September 21st, the SGRDA was awarded \$500,000 in OneGeorgia funds to assist with the construction of rail spur infrastructure improvements to serve the 350+ acre Pierce County Industrial Park, providing direct access to the CSX Class 1 railroad that is adjacent to the park. The Pierce County Industrial Park has sufficient acreage available for industrial development, but the lack of rail infrastructure in the park has been a formidable obstacle to recruitment. The SGRDA recognized that establishing a marketable industrial park was crucial to the economic health of not only Pierce County, but also its regional partners – Appling, Bacon, and Jeff Davis Counties; thus the joint development authority pursued OneGeorgia funding.

“We are delighted to make this investment in Pierce County not only because of the economic promise this represents to this community, but also because of the potential impacts across the region,” said Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) Commissioner Christopher Nunn. “Regional thinking and investment are key to economic prosperity, especially in rural parts of our state.” DCA recently featured the SGRDA OneGeorgia project in its 2020 Best of the Best Awards. A link to the award presentation is here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqQTJF2z8kU&feature=youtu.be>

The Southeast Georgia Regional Development Authority (SGRDA) was formed in 1995 by the counties of Appling, Bacon and Jeff Davis to provide additional employment opportunities to the joint authority’s counties, and to provide a revenue-sharing opportunity for each community. In August 2019, Pierce County and the Pierce County Industrial Development and Building Authority (PCIDBA) joined SGRDA. With its addition to SGRDA, Pierce County will participate in future revenue-sharing, which will now be allocated at 25% per county.

The OneGeorgia Equity Fund provides financial assistance to rural communities to help build the necessary infrastructure for economic development. Equity funds are also available as loans for several different types of projects, such as constructing speculative buildings in order to attract additional industries to these regions.

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Community and Economic Development

OneGeorgia Grant Awarded to Southeast Georgia Regional Development Authority (continued)

For more information on OneGeorgia Equity, please contact Kimberly Hobbs at (229) 333-5277.



Site of future rail spur in the Pierce County Industrial Park.



Area Agency on Aging (AAA)

SGRC-AAA Hosts Virtual Dementia Friends Georgia Session

Dementia Friends is a global movement that is changing the way people think, act, and talk about dementia. Developed by the Alzheimer's Society in the United Kingdom, the Dementia Friends movement is now spreading through Georgia. More than 150,000 Georgians have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, by helping everyone in a community understand what dementia is and how it affects people, it is believed that a difference can be made for people touched by dementia.

The SGRC-AAA has been offering Dementia Friend Information Sessions since 2019 and held six face-to-face sessions before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) changed the way everyone does business. So, in response to the "new normal" on Tuesday, September 29, the SGRC-AAA hosted its first Virtual Dementia Friends information session via the Zoom Meeting platform.

"Even when delivered in an online format, the impact of this one hour information session continues to resonate with participants and opens the door for more intense education programs such as "Dealing With Dementia," the four-hour program created by the Rosalynn Carter Institute, which is also available through the SGRC-AAA," said Betty Bryant, Dementia Specialist for the SGRC-AAA.

The next Virtual Dementia Friends session was held Tuesday, October 27. Additionally, virtual sessions will continue to be offered for as long as social distancing protocols are in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

For more information on aging services, please contact the AAA's Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) at (912)-287-5888 or at 1-888-732-4464; view the AAA website at: www.sgrc.us/aaa.html; and please take the time to like the SGRC-AAA Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/SouthernGeorgiaAreaAgencyonAging.



Pictured above (l to r) are Betty Bryant and Kimberly Rodgers of SGRC-AAA, who are Dementia Friend Champions, and Angela Jones, Clinch County Senior Center Director and information session participant.

Area Agency on Aging (AAA)

SGRC-AAA Shares Community Connection Stories

ALMA - Chris Williams, Director of the Bacon County Senior Center, recently shared pictures of Senior Center participants who have returned to the center, and who are enjoying visits from various community partners and friends of the senior center.



Pictured above (third from left) is Melissa King, Marketing Director with Hospice Satilla. She visited on October 6th and played Popcorn Bingo. In keeping with the theme, participants enjoyed popcorn and lemonade.



Pictured above far left is Judy Lowman, Wellness Coordinator with Diversified Resources, Inc. She visited on October 8th and played BINGOCIZE, which is a combination of bingo and exercise, and is a lot of fun.

TIFTON - When Sonny Manley, a driver for the Leroy Rogers Senior Center, arrived at Mary McNeil's home with her meal, she was struggling to get her groceries out of her car. Sonny immediately stopped what he was doing and helped her unload her groceries.

Fran Kinchen, Leroy Rogers Senior Center Director said, "Meal deliveries are more than just a meal to us and our seniors."



Pictured above are Mary McNeil and Sonny Manley, a driver for the Leroy Rogers Senior Center in Tifton.

Workforce Development

SGRC-Workforce Development Division On-the-Job Training Program Success Story

Meet Kevin Heard. With the help of WorkSource Southern Georgia's On-The-Job Training (OJT) program, he was able to learn the skills needed to do his job, all while being paid! He completed this training at Beach Timber Company, Inc. in Alma, Georgia, and he is now employed as a Machine Operator.

Beach Timber Company, Inc. is a family owned and operated Wood Products Manufacturing Company & Wood Dealership. Founded by Gary S. Strickland in 1984, according to their website, Beach Timber Company, Inc. is a white (untreated) pole mill, currently producing Southern yellow pine utility poles and piling. Beach Timber also produces a variety of landscaping mulch products including cypress mulch, colored mulch and pine mulch. For more information on this business, please find them on the web at <http://beachtimber.com/> or call Beach Timber at (912) 632-2800 to learn more about their products and services.

This successful on-the-job training placement was possible with help of the federally funded Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Interested employers who want to learn more about how this program could benefit their company, as well as potential and current employees, may contact Amy Jones by



Pictured above (L to R) Kevin Heard and Steve Strickland of Beach Timber

email at abalwin@sgrc.us, or by phone at (912) 285-6097 to learn more.

In addition, anyone interested in WIOA may contact one of the following service providers in their respective area: ETC Schools, Wiregrass Georgia Technical College, Eckerd Connects Paxen, and Southern Regional Technical College.

Information Technology (IT)

The SGRC-IT Division Shares Information on Getting to the Next Normal in Government Technology

According to Larry Adams, Director of the SGRC-IT Division, “State and local governments face an uncertain future as they battle through the ramifications of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.” So what will the new normal look like, and how does one get there?

Historically, pandemics have a long-lasting and severe effect on the economy, but there is another lesson: human ingenuity and adaptation march on. The deadly coronavirus may have shut down a large number of American businesses and forced many people to work from home, but it is also the driving force behind the acceleration of technological adoption.

The internet is a critical factor for coping with COVID-19 and staying connected. Even when the pandemic is over, it is predicted that governments, businesses, and society as a whole will not go back to exactly the way it was before the pandemic and everyone will be more reliant than ever on being connected to the internet.

Government technology leaders are not unique in the challenges faced moving forward to the “next normal.” The digital transformation trends have accelerated dramatically, and three of those common topics include:

- **Transition to the Cloud and Remote Work** - Project delivery and project design in the cloud has been commonplace for some time within the industry. However, COVID-19 has caused an acceleration of moving to the cloud for office productivity and overall company-wide collaboration.
- **Workforce Initiatives** - Companies may benefit from workforce investment in the areas of field reporting, safety checklists and inspections, human resources (HR) and engagement, and training. Focusing on such workforce initiatives can deliver immediate impact by appropriately leveraging technology.
- **Digitization of Key Workflows** - Automation of inefficient workflows can greatly improve the digital transformation of companies, including procurement, invoice routing and approvals, time and material (T&M) tickets and work directives, and daily reporting and job photos.

For more information on how the SGRC-IT Division may help, please contact Larry Adams by telephone at (229) 242-1988 or via email at ladams@sgrc.us.

Small Business Lending

SGRC Small Business Lending Assists Dhanvi21, LLC dba One Stop 6

Dhanvi 21, LLC is a newly formed entity to purchase the real estate located at 925 Patten Avenue in Ray City, Georgia. The company is 100% owned by Neel Patel who currently operates a convenience store and gas station located in the building. He has operated his store there for nearly 7 years and has decided to purchase the real estate for further investment. In conjunction with this purchase, Patel plans to open a package store, Mill Town Liquors, in the adjacent property which is attached his convenience store. The real estate is included as part of the purchase and Patel plans to apply for an SBA 7a loan for the interior improvements and start up inventory for the package store.



Patel has 10 plus years of experience in the convenience store and gas station industry, solely owning and operating four in the surrounding counties. The package store business will be a new venture for him; however, with his retail experience and family assistance with the package store industry, it will no doubt be a success.

The Southern Georgia Area Resource Development Agency's (SGARDA) assistance was sought in partnership with the Commercial Banking Company (CBC) to help fund this commercial real estate purchase. SGARDA Revolving Loan Funds provided 50% of the funding at a below market fixed rate for an extended period that is longer than what is conventionally offered. In conjunction with this project, the SGRC Small Business Lending staff will package the SBA 7a Loan application for the package store on behalf of CBC. This is a great example of how using multiple products offered by the Lending Department at SGRC can get a deal done and offer excellent benefits to a borrower.

For more information on the SGRC Lending and the programs offered, including COVID-19 relief funds, contact Rex Dorsey with the SGRC Lending Division at (229) 333-5277 or rdorsey@sgrc.us.

SGRC News

SGRC Valdosta Office Building Nearing Completion



Contact the SGRC

SGRC 2020 Council Meetings Schedule

December 10, 2020 – 11:00 am – Location TBD
(date subject to change)

The Georgia Council on Aging has named Ruth Lehmann Lee as the new chairwoman of the council. Lee, a long time Tifton resident, has served on the Georgia Council on Aging since being appointed in 2013 by then-Gov. Nathan Deal.

Prior to being selected as chairwoman, Lee served as vice chairwoman of the council for four years.

“I look forward to leading the council and further advocating for the needs of

older Georgians and increasing the membership for CO-AGE so we can have a louder voice,” Lee said in a news release.

Scott Courson, Director of Aging Services for the SGRC-AAA said, “We would like to extend our most sincere congratulations to Mrs. Lee on this nomination. We are grateful to see her in this leadership role on the Georgia Council of Aging as we believe the skills and passion she will bring to the position will result in many positive outcomes for senior citizens in our state.”



Ruth Lehmann Lee



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