



envision

COASTAL ALABAMA

Quarterly Update

May 2004

Coastal Alabama – Two Counties, One Region

By Gigi Armbrecht

Envision Coastal Alabama is a long-range strategic plan that is working to bridge the gap between Mobile and Baldwin counties by identifying areas for businesses and citizens to collaborate and share information. We're focusing our efforts on four areas – education, economy, environment and equity. And the work that's being done is bringing hundreds of volunteers together in a united effort to make our coastal region THE place everyone wants to live.

More than 350 businesses and nonprofit organizations are partners in Envision. Each one is demanding excellence in education; building a sustainable economy with well-paying, full-time jobs; balancing our natural resources with development; and providing equal opportunities for everyone living here. And with these goals ever-present, the work we are doing will create:

- the highest quality classroom teacher to most efficiently and directly affect a world-class educational community;
- cooperative, action-oriented partnerships and a sound, sustainable environment with the highest quality of life for all its community members;
- opportunities for all citizens to participate as full partners in community development; and
- infrastructure projects that are produced continually to improve our quality of life and economic development.

Envision Mobile-Baldwin was born in 1997 when more than 1,000 volunteers developed 152 goals for Baldwin and Mobile counties in the areas of government, education, infrastructure, community leadership, economic development and quality of life. In only five years Envision was able to shed light on the tremendous work of our coastal community's leaders and organizations. Just a few of the many successes during that time were:

- the completion of an air quality study;
- a regional tourism partnership spanning four states;
- public recycling centers;
- critical school-to-work partnerships



Gigi Armbrecht, BellSouth's regional manager, has served as Envision Coastal Alabama's chair for the last two years. In March she turned over the reins to the regional strategic partnership between Mobile and Baldwin counties.

that helped secure additional funding for public schools;

- improved water and sewage treatment plants; and
- passage of a statewide amendment to fund road and bridge projects and expand the Alabama State Port Authority.

In 2002, grassroots leaders in both counties realized it was time to rethink and repackage our vision. They rose to the challenge by renewing our regional focus and streamlining Envision's strategies.

Along with an updated strategic plan, we also updated our name. Today we are

Envision Coastal Alabama. With a renewed focus on regionalism, both counties have been working closely together and are recruiting even more volunteers in our four foundations of sustainability: environment, equity, economy and education. The four foundations, called "E-Teams," have hundreds of active volunteers working on their goals.

Selling the Envision story remains one of our toughest challenges. But it got a little easier this year when 42 leaders – representing each county equally – came to the same table for the inaugural

Leadership Coastal Alabama class. The programs of Leadership Mobile and Leadership Baldwin County agreed to merge their 2003-04 classes into one that focused on each of the four areas of Envision. This unique bond between men and women who might not have ever met one another is breaking down barriers each time they meet and work on their class project, designed to bring every elected official in Baldwin and Mobile County together to discuss the value of collaboration between the two counties.

On March 25, Envision Coastal Alabama celebrated its seventh anniversary with its annual meeting. During this meeting, two new chairs were installed to lead the efforts through 2005. They are **Terry Harbin** with Regions Bank, representing Mobile County, and **Sheila Hodges** of Meyer Real Estate, representing Baldwin County. This marks the first time Envision has had two chairs, equally representing both counties. Following this meeting, Envision co-sponsored "Smart Growth – A Balancing Act" with about a dozen groups including the Healthy Coastal Communities Initiative, a project of Mobile Bay National Estuary Program and Mobile Area Association of Realtors. This day-long program brought together very different ideas of how our coastal region should manage growth, but it is an important Envision initiative that we know will impact the coastal region's economy, environment and quality of life.

Envision's current goals look very different than those from 1997, but one thing has not changed – the belief that our two counties, through the efforts of dedicated volunteers, can effect changes improving the quality of life for generations. And through it all – our weaknesses and strengths, failures and successes, it's the people who are making Envision Coastal Alabama happen.

Gigi Armbrecht is a regional manager for BellSouth, and has served as chairman for Envision Coastal Alabama for the past two years. In addition, she is dean of the inaugural class of Leadership Coastal Alabama, an Envision initiative combining Leadership Mobile and Leadership Baldwin County.

Make a Difference in a Child's Life – Volunteer for Junior Achievement of Mobile

Motivating young people to stay in school is an important task. Junior Achievement of Mobile (JA) implements many programs in the Mobile County Public School System to inspire students to appreciate lifelong learning, develop positive attitudes toward work and contribute to a diverse society.

Quality curriculum is very important in the delivery of all Junior Achievement courses, but JA's success depends on the volunteers who deliver the messages in the classrooms. Junior Achievement's programs provide a meaningful way for business people and community volunteers to become involved in the public schools. Volunteers work directly with the students to demonstrate the significant link between the classroom and the workplace. With their diverse perspectives, volunteer role models offer encouragement to the students and instill the belief that they can reach their goals in life.

Junior Achievement is attempting to teach the "Economics of Staying in School" (ESIS) to all eighth graders in the



Chandra Harris with the Mobile Area Education Foundation teaches students at Hankins Middle School about the fundamentals of business. Harris, a volunteer for Junior Achievement, along with dozens of other volunteers across Mobile and Baldwin counties, is helping middle school students understand the basic elements of how to run a business.

Mobile County Public School System. ESIS delivers the message that education, or lack of it, will have a profound effect on their future and that students need to set

goals before entering high school.

JA needs additional volunteers to take its valuable message into the classroom.

"Teaching ESIS is a wonderful opportunity

for anyone who has looked at the problems in our community and thought, 'I wish I could make a difference,'" says Chandra Harris with the Mobile Area Education Foundation.

"We are working hard to expand our ESIS program, but we need to expand our volunteer base first," said Mary Ann Napper of the Mobile Area Education Foundation. "We have had a great response from volunteers." More than 60 percent of the volunteers are new this year. A continued increase in volunteers would allow the Foundation to teach ESIS to all Mobile County eighth graders and also add a personal economics course for ninth grade students in the fall."

Volunteers are needed immediately to teach the six-week course before the end of the school year, and in the fall. The Junior Achievement staff will conduct training for new volunteers.

For more information or to sign up as a volunteer, e-mail mnapper@maef.net or call Napper or Rebecca Johnson at (251) 476-0002.

Inaugural Class of Leadership Coastal Alabama Winds Down May 10

Class completes a year learning how to bring both counties together

What started as an idea more than two years ago is nearly complete. On May 10, 43 participants of the first class of Leadership Coastal Alabama (LCA) will meet with elected officials from both sides of Mobile Bay to talk about the important issues learned this past year on how the communities



can come together as a strong region. The idea for a joint leadership program was born in 2002 when Leadership Mobile's Director Katherine Phillips of Mobile United, and Leadership Baldwin's Director Linda Garrett of the University of South Alabama, Baldwin-Fairhope campus, held a joint session for class participants. The energy and excitement in the room spilled over to a new concept – why not have a year-long class with an equal number of participants from both counties to study how the region can better bring us together. Gigi Armbricht with BellSouth

and chairman of Envision, signed on as dean for this year's class.

During the year, national presenters were brought in to evoke frank discussions on topics ranging from building workgroups to creating a community development model everyone can buy in to; and demanding that local governments look beyond their city limits to grow as a region. Topics for LCA classes were developed around Envision's four areas of focus – economy, education, environment and equity.

While this was the inaugural class, participants in it agreed it should not be the last. If the class learned nothing else, each month opened new doors and more opportunities to learn about other communities and develop strong, lifetime professional relationships.

Leadership Coastal Alabama Graduates

BALDWIN COUNTY

- Clyde Abrams, Baldwin EMC
- Patti Bodenhamer, Consultant/Trainer
- Will Cabaniss, United Bank
- Nick Cillo, University of Mobile
- Barry Compagnoni, U.S. Coast Guard
- Dan Dealy, Watermark Design Group LLC
- Carolyn Doughty, Meyer Real Estate/City of Gulf Shores
- Michael Druhan, SouthTrust Bank
- Bonnie Lee Gray, Orange Beach Public Library
- Faron Hollinger EdD, Baldwin County Public Schools
- Brenda Lee, South Baldwin County United Way
- Jeff Moon, City of Orange Beach
- Charlie Murphy, City of Robertsdale/BellSouth
- Debbie Quinn, City of Fairhope
- Cindy Wilson EdD, University of South Alabama – Baldwin County- Fairhope

MOBILE COUNTY

- Jimmy Barber, Mobile Police Department
- Bill Bice, U.S. Department of Labor/OSHA
- Alec Blankenship PhD, Southeastern Surgical Specialists
- Lynda Carroll EdD, Spring Hill College
- Wanda Cochran, City of Mobile

- Kenny Coleman, Alabama Power Co.
- Don Davis, Mobile County Probate Court
- Mike Dickerson, SouthTrust Bank
- Chuck Faulker, Goodwin, Mills & Cawood Inc.
- Jim Fuller, Jim D. Fuller LLC
- Dan Garland, Colonial Bank
- Shelbonnie Hall, City of Mobile
- Chandra Harris, Mobile Area Education Foundation
- Leigh Perry Herndon, Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce
- Quin Hillyer, *Mobile Register*
- Paul Houslen, University of South Alabama
- Flo Kessler, Mobile County Commission
- Bruce McGowin, Hand Arendall LLC
- Bill Meredith, Bayou La Batre Chamber of Commerce
- Beth Morrisette, Junior League of Mobile
- Stephen O'Hearn, Thompson Engineering
- Jennie Reese, Retired
- Deborah Robinson, Mobile Realty
- David Sutey, Regions Bank
- Pat Taylor EdD, St. Paul's Episcopal School
- David Waite, The Salvation Army
- Alan Whaley, Infirmary Health System
- David Yeager, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program/Dauphin Island Sea Lab

Clean Water Guardians Protect Water Quality in Mobile and Baldwin Counties



Billy Robinson and family accept the Clean Water Guardian sign. They received the sign after signing on to monitor water quality in the two-county region.

Protecting water quality is a hot topic of conversation in the coastal community and a primary focus area for Envision Coastal Alabama's environment team.

One local program is honoring businesses and individuals who take action to protect local water bodies and keep water clean. In the past two years, more than 50 homeowners and six businesses from Mobile and Baldwin counties have been recognized through the Clean Water Guardian program for committing to protect Alabama's coastal waters from polluted runoff.

"This program recognizes the simple steps that an individual or business can take to prevent pollutants from washing into our waterways after a rainstorm," said

Jody Scanlan, project coordinator for Clean Water Guardians.

Clean Water Guardians is an effort of the Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center, and identifies homeowners and businesses in specific categories including construction, agriculture, forestry, food services, automotive and landscaping. Potential recipients can be nominated or apply themselves.

Any landowner is eligible to participate in the Clean Water Guardian program.

Applications for each category vary slightly and are available on the Clean Water Guardians Web site: www.ag.auburn.edu/fisheries/aumerc/Extension/clean_water_guardians/Clean_Water_Guardians.html.

Eastern Shore Chamber Leadership Awareness Seminar A Huge Success

More than 50 people participated in the Eastern Shore Chamber's inaugural Leadership Awareness series held in January. Three workshops, focusing on community leadership and involvement were offered.

"The goal of the class, put on by the governmental affairs committee, was to inspire people in the community to get involved," said Darrelyn Bender, Eastern Shore Chamber president. "If this class was any indication of the interest within the community, our future looks bright."

Workshop highlights included an opening address by former Rep. Jack Edwards and a session with Jim Bennett, a member of Gov. Bob Riley's cabinet. Edwards discussed the importance of community involvement and how one person can make a difference in Alabama's future.

Bennett, a former Secretary of State, spoke on volunteerism saying, "Volunteering brings all manner of benefits. Not only can you make a difference in your community by volunteering for a civic, church, Chamber, charitable, environmental or

political cause, but medical researchers are discovering a direct correlation between volunteerism and good health."

Participants also learned how a bill becomes law; what decisions are made at the city, county and state levels; and how Alabama's Constitution affects the daily lives of citizens. A mock board meeting helped educate the class on Roberts Rules of Orders and the importance of running a meeting succinctly.



Jim Bennett addresses the Eastern Shore Chamber Leadership Awareness Seminar. More than 50 people participated in the inaugural program.

Foreign-Trade Zone Expansion Approved

The region's economic future received a big boost in January with the announcement that the city's Foreign-Trade Zone expansion project for Mobile and Baldwin counties is complete. An Envision-based strategy, the expansion effort has been underway for five years and is an outgrowth of Envision Coastal Alabama with assistance from the Mobile Foreign-Trade Zone Corp., City of Mobile, Mobile Airport Authority, Mobile Area Chamber, Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance and Alabama State Port Authority.

Mobile worked with the U.S. Department of Commerce on the expansion, and Mobile Mayor Mike Dow announced the project's completion, increasing the land designated from 1,035 acres to more than 9,800 acres. The expansion allows Mobile to help domestically-based businesses compete with foreign-based companies by reducing costs associated with customs duties and tariffs.

"This expansion will be extraordinarily beneficial as we work to attract new business investment to this area," says Bill Sisson, vice president of economic devel-

opment for the Mobile Area Chamber. "Not only are jobs retained and created because of the Foreign-Trade Zone, but it also creates opportunities for suppliers and service providers in the community."

Lance LaCour, president of the Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance, says, "Foreign-Trade Zones increase the ability of participating local companies to compete with international businesses."

U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones are specially designated areas in, or adjacent to, U.S. ports of entry designed to enhance the

competitiveness of U.S.-based businesses engaged in international trade. Mobile's zone has accounted for roughly \$1 billion in zone-related economic activity since 1998. Included in this activity are sites at Atlantic Marine, Degussa and Shell Chemical.

The newly expanded general-purpose zone will include additional acreage at Brookley Field and extend northward along the east and west banks of the Mobile River, as well as 11 additional non-contiguous sites in both Mobile and Baldwin counties.

Envision Names New Co-Chairs and E-Team Chairs

First time initiative has chairs from both counties

Envision Coastal Alabama celebrated yet another success during its annual meeting held March 25 – it installed new co-chairs for the initiative representing both Baldwin and Mobile counties.



Terry Harbin

Sheila Hodges

Terry Harbin with Regions Bank and Sheila Hodges of Meyer Real Estate were named the Envision co-chairs for Mobile and Baldwin County, respectively. This marks the first time in the program's eight year history that both counties share responsibility for Envision.

Most recently Gigi Armbrecht with BellSouth was chair of Envision. She was

preceded by John Davis of Mobile Gas Service Corp.

"Neither business executives nor tourists see the dividing line between Baldwin and Mobile counties," said Harbin. "The water surrounding coastal Alabama unites us for business, recreation

and transportation. It creates a common identity for both sides of the bay."

Both are excited to be leading Envision, and have been active volunteers in years past. Harbin most recently co-chaired Envision's economy team.

For Hodges, she's most interested in

recruiting more volunteers to Envision, especially from Baldwin County, and getting them interested in learning how a grassroots initiative can impact the two-county region. She believes people should "look at the Envision action teams and pick a project that matches (their) passion."

To reach Harbin, call (251) 690-1595 or Hodges, call (251) 968-7516.

Also during the annual meeting three of Envision's action teams – economy, education and environment named new co-chairs for 2004-2005. The equity action team's co-chairs, Ron Martin of Alabama Power Co. and Phil Norris of University of South Alabama (USA) Baldwin, Fairhope Campus will remain in their current positions. The equity team is planning a regional transportation summit for later in the year and felt it was important for Martin and Norris to see the project through fruition.

Action Team Co-chairs are:

Economy:

- Frank Leatherbury, Leatherbury Realty Inc., (Baldwin) – (251) 709-0109
- Mike Hofto, Saunders Engine Co., (Mobile) – (251) 456-4507

Education:

- Anthony Kaiser, Kaiser Real Estate, (Baldwin) – (251) 968-4300
- Jill Zurfluh, (Mobile) – (251) 602-0070

Environment:

- David Yeager, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, (Baldwin) – (251) 431-6409
- Elizabeth Phillips, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, (Mobile) – (251) 574-8445

Equity:

- Phil Norris, University of South Alabama, Baldwin - Fairhope Campus (Baldwin) – (251) 928-8133
- Ron Martin, Alabama Power Co., (Mobile) – (251) 434-5621

What is Envision Coastal Alabama?

In 1997 more than 1,000 citizens from Mobile and Baldwin counties spent a year developing a long-range strategic plan to provide a framework for their vision. The original document contained more than 150 strategies in six focus areas of education, infrastructure, quality of life, economic development, government and community leadership.

In 2002, Envision Coastal Alabama began a regional, re-visioning process refining these strategies and collapsing the existing focus areas into four foundations of sustainability – economy, education, environment and equity. Today, more than 400 volunteers are actively engaged in the regional projects of Envision Coastal Alabama.

To get involved, contact Linda Ingram at 431-8628 or linda@mobilechamber.com.



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