



envision

COASTAL ALABAMA

Quarterly Update

August 2004

Envision Coastal Alabama – I'm Getting It



By Terry Harbin

When I was first invited to attend an Envision meeting several years ago, I really didn't know much

about it. **John Davis**, president of Mobile Gas Service Corp. and chairman of Envision at the time, invited me to attend. I had so much personal respect for him that the least I could do would be to check it out, as he was only asking for a small investment of time.

While at this meeting, John's words struck me when he referred to the Old Testament proverb, "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

I learned Envision Coastal Alabama is providing that vision in the areas of economy, education, environment and equity via a group of concerned volunteers in Mobile and Baldwin counties who have joined together to not only visualize a better place for us all to live and work, but to actually get involved and plan for a better tomorrow. From that point on, I was hooked. Little did I know that I'd one day be sharing the job of Envision chair with **Sheila Hodges** of Meyer Real Estate.

The first question I asked after joining in the process was "How does this Envision 'thing' really work?" Does Envision sponsor projects on its own or does it simply serve as a collaborator among the various interests in our community? It's a pretty difficult concept to grasp, and I had to ask myself many times, "How can I impact this region?" Over time, I've realized it's these wonderful people who are your co-workers, neighbors and friends who are making Envision work.

The recent Smart Growth conference held at the Arthur R. Outlaw Mobile Convention Center is just one example of Envision at work. The idea came about a year ago during the Envision annual meeting when participants in an economy breakout session kicked around the concept of smart growth and the need for more information about it.

I joined Envision as the Economy Team co-chair representing Mobile County, and along with my Baldwin County co-

chair, **Bob Mullican**, agreed the timely topic of smart growth should be a top Envision priority for 2004. Having served as a member of the City of Mobile Smart Growth Task Force charged with developing and implementing smart growth initiatives for the city of Mobile, I was already fairly familiar with smart growth and its community-wide benefits. I learned even more during the Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Trip to Austin, Texas, last spring.

Bob brought **Wendy Allen** and **Charlene Lee** of the Healthy Coastal Communities Initiative (now known as Interlink LLC) to the table to plan the smart growth conference and off we went. Collaboration, communication and cooperation are the operative words for Envision's regional focus, and the partners and sponsors of the smart growth conference demonstrated that. Soon, **Laura Clarke** of the City of Mobile Urban

Development Department joined the planning task force as did other stakeholders from the two-county region, including Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, Alabama State Port Authority, Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Mobile Area Board of Realtors, Leatherbury Real Estate and others.

Nationally recognized experts were secured to cover diverse perspectives of smart growth – environmental impact and development. Through the participation of the real estate and commercial development communities, along with environmental agencies, a common vision surfaced; everyone wants a better and healthier quality of life and a more livable community.

Open lines of communication resulted in a very successful conference of more than 300 participants. Today, smart growth mini-conferences are being scheduled to continue the dialogue and education with

even more stakeholders at the table from both counties.

One of the first principles I learned when entering the business world a number of years ago was, "Those who fail to plan, plan to fail." We do not want to be guilty of failing to plan for a healthy, sustainable community in the present or the future. The vision has begun for coastal Alabama, and we need you to get involved. Log onto the Envision Web site – www.envisioncoastalalabama.org – and learn about Envision's seven-year history and its plans for future growth. Find an initiative that matches your passion, and sign up to work on a project.

Together we're building a better coastal Alabama.

Terry Harbin is senior vice president, sales and marketing, of Regions Bank and represents Mobile County as Envision co-chair. October's quarterly update will include a message from Sheila Hodges, Envision co-chair from Baldwin County.



Members of the inaugural Leadership Coastal Alabama class held its culminating event in May at the USS Alabama Battleship, more than 250 elected officials in Mobile and Baldwin counties, along with chamber of commerce executives, Gov. Bob Riley and Rep. Jo Bonner, attended. The event was held to promote the cooperative spirit between the two counties and encourage further collaboration.

Environmental Protection Efforts Recognized Through Green Awards

Protecting Coastal Alabama's environment means preserving its history and protecting its way of life. Mobile United is giving a voice to initiatives that have made great strides in environmental protection through the Green Awards.

Bestowed annually by the organization's Natural Resources Committee, the awards recognize Mobile-area businesses, organizations or individuals for efforts

leading to sustainable development practices, aesthetic improvement, reduction in urban sprawl or preservation of green spaces. The following 2004 Green Award recipients were recognized in April.

- **Cooper Riverside Park** – Named for the late Ervin Cooper, president of Cooper/T. Smith Corp., the park preserves a much-needed green space on Mobile River in downtown Mobile and offers visi-

tors the opportunity to experience a working waterfront.

- **Mobile Register Building** – The new, 215,000-square-foot offset printing plant revitalizes the corner of Beauregard and Water Streets and enhances the Water Street Corridor. The older *Mobile Register* building on Government Street was donated to the Center for the Living Arts and is open as Space 301, a unique anchor for

the downtown arts district.

- **GM&O Terminal** – The renovation of this 1907 Spanish Colonial structure revived the rail terminal on the Mobile River as a regional transportation center. The project used \$19 million in public and private funds, and the structure now includes Metro Transit and a first-class office complex.

- **Parkway Pride** – This grassroots community group planted approximately 6,000 trees along the five-mile corridor down both sides of Dauphin Island Parkway from I-10 South to the Dog River Bridge. The largest private tree-planting project ever in Alabama involved more than 200 volunteers planting crepe myrtle, wax myrtles and live oak trees.

- **Kevin White**, University of South Alabama Department of Engineering – White was recognized for his individual efforts to implement on-site waste water treatment systems with Mobile Area Water and Sewer System. He took these technologies to the Copeland Island neighborhood (in west Mobile), and the project is an example of extending land use areas without burdening infrastructure support.



Winners of the Green Awards were announced this spring during an annual banquet. From left to right, Aven Warner, Debi Foster, Parkway Pride; Steve Walker, City of Mobile; Mike Marshall, Mobile Register; David Cooper, Cooper Riverside Park; and Kevin White, University of South Alabama.

Mobile and Baldwin Chamber Executives Meet with Legislators

Chamber executives from Mobile and Baldwin counties are getting face time with Alabama legislators. Leaders from 11 chambers were invited to meet with members of the area's legislative delegation on May 24 to hear an update on the most recent session. Not only did the lunch meeting provide the opportunity for a behind-the-scenes look at how to navigate legislative waters, it gave both counties the chance to share common agendas and needs with the region's elected officials. This meeting served as a follow-up to a similar breakfast held before the legislative session convened in early March.

"It is such a strong practice for both counties to meet together and with our legislators," said **Mark Berson**, president of the Alabama Gulf Coast Chamber of Commerce. "Our goals are very much the same, and having the forum to share our needs with the legislators helps them better represent our region."

Pam Burnham, executive director of the Saraland Area Chamber of Commerce, agreed. "It was an extremely informative session and is such a great way to promote regionalism. What is good for one chamber is good for another, and these meetings give us the chance to have an inside view of the legislative process."

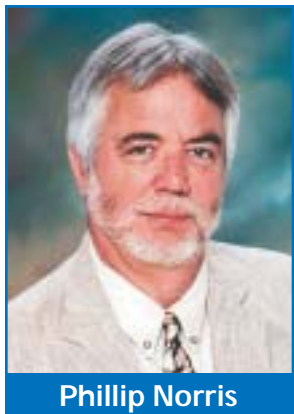


First row, left to right: Will Lafield, Eastern Shore; Bridget McDonald, North Baldwin; Mark Berson, Alabama Gulf Coast; Win Hallett, Mobile Area; Francis Holk, South Baldwin; and Jim Hall, Dauphin Island. *Second row, left to right:* Donna Watts, South Baldwin; Brett Dungan, Bayou la Batre; Reeda Taylor, Saraland; Pamela Burnham, Saraland; Darrelyn Bender, Eastern Shore; Toni Knox, Dauphin Island; Bruce Lockette, Prichard; Stephanie Johnson, Prichard; and Bud Robertson, Bayou la Batre.

Equity Team Chair Receives Appointment from Governor

Envision leaders reach far beyond coastal Alabama in their role of promoting regionalism and furthering growth of the Mobile Bay area. Through an appointment by Gov. Bob Riley to a committee of the Southern Growth Policies Board, **Phillip Norris PhD**, Envision equity team chair from Baldwin County and director of University of South Alabama Baldwin County campus, will work to take regionalism in the area to the next level.

The Southern Growth Policies Board is a non-partisan, public policy think tank based in Research Triangle Park, N.C.. The organization was formed by the region's governors in 1971 to develop and advance visionary economic development policies for the 13 Southern member states. It provides a forum for partnership and dialogue among a diverse cross-section of the



Phillip Norris

region's governors, legislators, business and academic leaders, and the community and economic development sectors.

Norris will represent Alabama on the board's advisory council on the Southern community, focusing on growth, quality of life, leadership, civic engagement and community development.

"I am excited by this appointment," said Norris. "It will give us the chance to look at the large issue of how to encourage civic involvement in our growth efforts, as well as showcase examples of success stories from other states in the Southern region. We can learn from their experiences regarding sustainable growth and hopefully take regionalism here to the next level – regionalism as it relates to the entire Central Gulf Coast, from Tallahassee to New Orleans."



Gov. Bob Riley met with reporters following his remarks as a keynote speaker at the Leadership Coastal Alabama graduation. Riley commented that southwest Alabama is a hotbed of economic activity, with four of the top five statewide economic development projects are being recruited here.

Equity Team Sponsors New Freedom Initiative Program

More than 80 people attended President George Bush's New Freedom Initiative, a corporate leadership conference, on May 24. The event was sponsored by Envision Coastal Alabama's Equity Team and the United Way of Southwest Alabama Inc. and hosted by Rep. Jo Bonner.

The New Freedom Initiative is a comprehensive strategy for achieving full inclusion of individuals with disabilities into all aspects of the nation's social, cultural and economic life. It mirrors the Equity Team's focus on increasing opportunities for all Coastal Alabama residents through equal access to housing, education and employment.

This program – a project of the Epilepsy Foundation of South Alabama's JobTech[®] Employment Program is seeking to advance the hiring of people with disabilities in the Mobile/Baldwin area. Conference speakers explained the initiative to area business leaders, human resource personnel and service providers and shared with them information and resources on how to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

On hand to explain the initiative were **Hon. Cari Dominguez** and **Hon. Paul Steven Miller**, chair and commissioner, respectively, of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The panel also included **Peggy Mastroianni**, with the EEOC's Office of Legal Counsel, and **Beverly Hinton**, from the EEOC's Birmingham office, who spoke in detail on the ADA. This conference was the second of its kind in the country conducted by the EEOC in its advocacy and education efforts on the initiative.

Angel Persson, office manager for Kvaerner Oil Field Products in Mobile, said, "The program was particularly useful for me in my human resources role. It gave me insight into the initiative itself, where federal and state monies are going to support persons with disabilities, and resources I can use to secure job applicants that fit these profiles. It was extremely informative."

For more information on the New Freedom Initiative or for a handbook on employing the disabled, visit www.eeoc.gov.

Local leaders who spoke at the conference included:

- **Alexandra Finucane**, vice president, legal and governmental affairs, Epilepsy Foundation;
- **Peggy Anderson**, state coordinator of employment development, ADA coordinator, Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services;
- **Sydney Raine**, president, Mobile Works Inc.;
- **Sheldon L. Morgan**, chairman, JobTech[®] Business Advisory Council, Epilepsy Foundation of South Alabama;
- **David Prichard PhD**, environmental biologist, Metric Engineering (JobTech[®] client);
- **Frank Mitchell Garrett**, executive director, Epilepsy Foundation of South Alabama; and
- **Ron Martin**, co-chair, Envision Coastal Alabama equity team, Alabama Power Co.

Envision Coastal Alabama Video/ Speaker's Bureau Available

Contact **Linda Ingram** at (251) 431-8628 or linda@mobilechamber.com to book a speaker or reserve a copy of the Envision Coastal Alabama six-minute video featuring the people and programs of Envision Coastal Alabama. The video was created for use as a volunteer recruiting tool and for presentation to area civic, professional and business meetings and events.

Metro Transit Named in Top 10 Most Improved Transit Systems

Keeping company with transit systems from as far away as Canada and the West Coast to neighbors in Georgia and Florida, Metro Transit was recognized by *Metro Magazine* – a monthly industry publication – in May for its improved bus service. Named one of the Top 10 Most Improved transit systems in North America, Metro Transit implemented many changes and new programs anticipated to increase ridership by 10 percent each year for the next three years.

The transit system used a multi-layered approach to accomplish its goals. The plan is the outgrowth of a 2001 strategic planning initiative, a subsequent comprehensive analysis of the system and public meetings.

It included 22 new buses equipped with fare boxes and aid equipment for the disabled, expanded service into areas previously not serviced, route improvements, increased route frequency on 50 percent of the system, increased productivity through new routing software and a communications firm to enhance the brand.

Additionally, the maintenance department streamlined its operations by getting rid of old equipment and will be renovating its repair facility, a needed step to service the 38 trolleys, buses and vans operated by Metro Transit.

Most innovative is the introduction of a demand-response, neighborhood taxi-like service in west Mobile.

“Customers call to make appointments for pickup,” said **Bob Williams**, general manager of Metro Transit and Envision economy committee team member. “Our vans take them to and from work, from home to stores, to Providence Hospital, really anywhere they need to go within the neighborhood service area, including the end of the line for the fixed bus route. We also can coordinate a daily work pick-up schedule with riders.”

So far, the demand-response service is going well and serves the airport, Schillinger Road corridor and the Tillman’s Corner area. The fare is \$1.25 each way if the rider stays within the service area, with an additional 10 cents if transferring to a fixed route.

In an effort to heighten awareness for the need for strong public transportation in lower Alabama, Metro Transit and Baldwin County Transit Coalition will host a five-county transit summit in the first half of 2005.

“A good transit system can strengthen the economy and bring new business to the area,” said Williams. “And every strong system needs a dedicated source of funding.”

The summit will bring leaders from other markets to share their transit success stories and speak to local political and business leaders, as well as transit personnel from other Gulf Coast markets. Williams and **Stan Virden**, of Baldwin County PTC, are chairing the summit.

Mobile and Baldwin Counties Seek to Improve Mobility in the Region

In a visionary transportation initiative for the Mobile Bay area, the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission (SARPC) is conducting a study on behalf of the City of Mobile. The outcome will determine the feasibility of transit services to connect Mobile to other communities around the bay and to the Mobile Regional Airport.

The study looks at establishing passenger ferry service – a form of transportation used on the bay until the opening of the Cochrane Bridge in 1927 – from Mobile’s central business district to other destinations in Baldwin County on Mobile Bay. It

also explores the type and size of vessels that should be used. The second part of the study evaluates linking Mobile Regional Airport to the central business district, including possible connections to the ferry terminal and the GM&O terminal. The combined feasibility studies examine potential markets, routes, services and cost.

“The time could be right for service like this, especially with the new cruise terminal and development of the waterway and waterfront,” said **Ginny Russell**, study task force member and vice president of community and governmental affairs at the

Mobile Area Chamber. “It offers us the opportunity to really look at mobility issues in a different way.”

“These alternate and expanded modes of transit will help with job access to different regions around the bay, as well as allow people in highly dense areas, like the Airport Boulevard corridor, a variety of transportation options,” said SARPC’s **April Guthrie**.

The transportation study was initiated last year and is being managed by a task force with representation from Baldwin and Mobile counties.

“The diversity of participation in this process has been good from both counties,” said Russell.

There has been significant opportunity for public input through multiple public meetings. This month final recommendations will be presented by Day Wilburn Associates Inc., the transportation planning and engineering firm based in Atlanta that helped facilitate the study. To review the study recommendations, visit www.sarpc.org or e-mail Guthrie at aguthrie@sarpc.org for a copy of the final report.



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