

SOUTHWESTERN COMMISSION

IN THE VICINITY

First Quarter— 2007

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Southwestern Commission
125 Bonnie Lane
Sylva, NC 28779

828-586-1962 Phone
828-586-1968 Fax

SOUTHWESTERN COMMISSION HOLDS OPEN HOUSE CELEBRATION

2006 was yet another year of transition for the Southwestern Commission. Among these changes was our physical move from Bryson City. After three decades in Swain County, the US Federal Building no longer met the Commission's needs. Thanks to authority granted in 2005 by the Commission's Governing Board, we began a search for alternate quarters and now have a new, energy efficient 6,000 sq. ft home in Webster. This new facility is very attractive, inside and outside. It provides easy access to Commission services, and a pleasing, comfortable home for staff and visitors.



Our new home was dedicated on November 14, 2006 during an open house attended by an estimated 300 friends, associates and members of the Governing Board. The Commission was formally welcomed to our new offices by the chief elected officials of Dillsboro, Sylva, Webster and the County of Jackson.



Ribbon cutting participants from left to right; Mary Barker, Jean Hartbarger, Maurice Moody, Vicki Greene, Brenda Oliver, Bill Gibson, Steve Gray, Glenn Jones, Kate Welch and Roger Wiggins.

The Commission expresses its gratitude to State Senator John Snow for sponsoring legislation during the 2006 session that will allow the Commission to purchase its new offices via conventional mortgage financing.

In celebration of moving to new offices, Brian McMahan, Chairman of the Jackson County Commissioners, presented the Commission with "Fabric of a Nation," a framed collection of the United States flag and the flags of all fifty states.



Assistance, Service and Progress

REGION A ADMINISTRATOR WINS STATE AWARD

We are so pleased to announce that Mary Barker has been chosen as the SHIIP Coordinator of the Year.

SHIIP (Senior Health Insurance Information Program) is a statewide initiative of the North Carolina Department of Insurance, and Mary's work was singled out among the work of the 109 coordinators throughout the state. The SHIIP Program is celebrating its 20th year, and a beautiful plaque was presented to Mary at a special reception in Swain County on September 21, 2006.

This award is an acknowledgement of the hard work and leadership demonstrated by Mary throughout Region A in making information and assistance, regarding Medicare Part D Prescription Plans, accessible to senior citizens throughout our region. When the Medicare Part D initiative first entered the landscape, Mary ensured that AAA staff was fully trained and easily accessible, because she knew this was an important issue that was going to be on the minds of our residents. Through her leadership, we

provided counseling and information in nursing homes, in the office, at support groups, at nutrition sites and senior centers, at public libraries, and anywhere in Region A that needed help.

In presenting the award, Josiah Bova, Regional Manager for SHIIP's western region announced that over 25,000 individuals in his region received counseling and

assistance in making informed decisions.

Please join the Southwestern Commission governing board and staff in congratulating Mary Barker for this well deserved award.



Mary Barker and Josiah Bova at the SHIIP award presentation.

NC DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE RELEASES 2007 COUNTY TIER RANKINGS UNDER NEW TAX CREDIT FORMULA

State lawmakers last summer overhauled the economic incentive program it uses for industrial recruitment, and now the state Department of Commerce has released county distress rankings that set the level of incentives in each of the state's 100 counties. Lawmakers felt an overhaul of the 10-year-old William S. Lee Act was in order amid concerns that the tax credit program was too complicated and not reaching distressed counties. The new law reduces the number of tiers that describe a county's economic distress ranking from five to three, and offers a new real property investment tax credit to encourage companies to locate or

expand in the most distressed counties.

Under the new law, the state's 40 most economically distressed counties are designated as Tier 1 counties, the middle 40 counties are classified as Tier 2 and the top 20 counties are now Tier 3 counties. Rankings are based on an assessment of each county's unemployment rate, median household income, population growth and assessed property value. Counties with populations of less than 12,000 and those with a population of fewer than 50,000 residents with 19 percent or more living below the federal poverty level are automatically ranked among the 40 most

distressed counties.

The law both increases the types of companies eligible to receive tax credits and stipulates fiscal and environmental requirements for companies to receive credits. To be eligible for tax credits, eligible companies will now be required to offer employees health insurance and pay at least 50 percent of the premiums, prove that they do not owe back taxes and that they have not received a significant environmental violation notice from the state Department of Environment and Natural Resources. The new law also provides for extra tax credits for companies that

locate in high poverty urban areas and new Agrarian Growth Zones. (Source: Rural Partners Update 2006.)

County tier designations for the Business Expansion Act for Region A counties are as follows:

County	2007 Rank
Cherokee.....	2
Clay.....	1
Graham.....	1
Haywood.....	3
Jackson.....	2
Macon.....	2
Swain.....	2

NEED A FACILITATOR OR TWO?

It's that time of year again. Local governments and their agencies are scheduling their annual retreats. Our facilitation staff members are already scheduled to facilitate retreats for the Macon

County Board of Commissioners and the Macon County Health Department Board. We are working on a date for the Town of Waynesville's retreat, sometime at the end of February. Another

facilitation opportunity is with Tri-County Community College. We will facilitate a meeting soon to get community input into the selection of the next college president. If you have an interest in a

retreat, please call 828.586.1962. Our skilled facilitators, Vicki Greene, Cindy Miles, Bill Gibson, and Tom Tyre, will do their best to work you into this early spring facilitation rush.

DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME: WHEN WE CHANGE OUR CLOCKS

Since 1966, most of the United States has observed Daylight Saving Time from 2:00 a.m. on the first Sunday of April to 2:00 a.m. on the last Sunday of October. Beginning in 2007, most of

the U.S. will begin Daylight Saving Time at 2:00 a.m. on the second Sunday in March and revert to standard time on the first Sunday in November.

On August 8, 2005,

President George W. Bush signed the *Energy Policy Act of 2005*. This Act changed the time change dates for Daylight Saving Time in the U.S., beginning in 2007. The Secretary of Energy will report the

impact of this change to Congress, who retains the right to resume the 2005 Daylight Saving Time schedule once the Department of Energy study is complete.

Region A Observes National Family Caregiver and National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month

Several years ago, the Eastern North Carolina and Western Carolina Alzheimer's Association Chapters created Candlelight Reflections to bring together Alzheimer's families, friends, and supporters. This year, in an effort to further increase awareness about dementia and its effect on families, the NC Alzheimer's Support network joined the NC Family Caregiver Support Program to honor all families and friends taking on the role of caregiving

and/or living with dementia and other debilitating conditions.

In Region A, Candlelight Reflections was a momentous beginning to both National and NC Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month, which is held every November. Candlelight Reflections services and observances occurred throughout our seven counties on Wednesday, November 1, 2006 as well as Sunday, November 5, 2006. 100% of the Area Agency on Aging's service providers, and nearly every one of our 60 long term care facilities participated. Special county-wide services were held in five counties, and countless churches

observed Candlelight Reflections in either their mid-week prayer or Sunday morning worship service.

The ways that Candlelight Reflections were observed throughout Region A took many forms. In Haywood County alone, 200+ participants observed Candlelight Reflections as a part of the Memory Walk for Alzheimer's Disease. In Macon County, Angel Hospice partnered with the Macon County Senior Services to conduct a special Candlelight Reflections service. Even elected officials embraced this initiative: Senator John Snow, whose mother-in-law recently lost her battle with Alzheimer's disease, spoke at the service for Cherokee/Clay



counties, and Representative Phil Haire joined the service in Jackson County.

Our hope is that the flame of each candle served to enlighten our communities and state leaders regarding the increased numbers of those living with Alzheimer's and the critical need to support all family caregivers. For more information contact the Area Agency on Aging Family Caregiver Support Program.



CAREER READINESS CERTIFICATION— AN IMPORTANT NEW BUSINESS TOOL

Employers know that the cost of hiring, training and retention of qualified employees is critical to saving time and money. They also know that a high school diploma is not a reliable indicator of an applicant's skills or abilities. Around the country, twenty-seven states have begun using a credential, most often called the *Career Readiness Certificate* (CRC) which indicates the skill levels in the three areas that are most needed in 80% of the jobs in the US. Those skills are applied mathematics, locating information and reading for information.

In order to obtain the credential, an applicant takes an assessment which indicates the levels to which he or she can use the three identified skills and then is issued a card, modeled after a charge card, and a printed certificate usually signed by the state's governor. In most states, the cards indicate one of three levels of achievement: Bronze, Silver, or Gold - Gold being the highest. This portable skills credential is easily and universally understood and valued by employers, educators, and recipients. For job seekers who want to improve their skills, they can "upgrade" by using computer software which is available at the CRC site.

The North Carolina Department of Commerce, Commission on Workforce Development has provided funding to add ten additional sites to an existing seventeen pilot sites currently issuing the *Career Readiness Certificate* in the state. The current sites are located at community colleges and are working closely with job link centers. In some instances, the job link is located on the college campus.

There are currently no pilot sites for the project in Region A, the nearest one is located at the Joblink Center on the campus of Blue Ridge Community College near Hendersonville. Two local community colleges have written proposals for consideration in becoming new pilot sites. The Southwestern NC Workforce Development Board is working closely with the colleges to bring this innovative development tool to our area.

For businesses and industries who want a more specific assessment of skills required in their particular place of work, professional job profilers are able to work with the company and identify additional skills that are needed. There are accompanying WorkKeys assessments which can identify the skill level of applicants for that particular job after the profile has been created. The Southwestern Commission has two certified profilers who can work with local employers toward that goal. For more information about profiling or the Career Readiness Certificate, contact Barbara Mills at (828) 586-1962 ext. 207.

MACON INTERAGENCY COUNCIL MEETS AT JOBLINK

On December 7, 2006 the Macon County Job Link office hosted the first Macon County Interagency Council meeting facilitated by Candace Hardin, WIA youth case manager of Southwestern Planning Commission. Attending agencies included NC Employment Security Commission, NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, REACH,

Macon County Public Health Dept., Macon Area Transit, Macon Program for Progress, LBJ Job Corps, Macon County Dept. of Social Services, Appalachian Counseling, and Webster Enterprises, Inc.

The initial meeting served as a forum for Macon County human service professionals to become acquainted with each other and also with

the programs offered to individuals in Macon County. The interagency council's ultimate goal is that through existing and new partnerships, individuals in Macon County will receive streamline effective services to promote personal development in a variety of areas. This council will meet quarterly and discuss changes or developments in

programs in Macon County and also serve as a forum to target common issues associated with service delivery and possible solutions to such issues. Since this first quarterly meeting, interest has grown and other agencies are contacting the Job Link to request participation in this council.

UPCOMING EVENTS WITH THE AAA

AAA Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon / Training in April 2007 at the Cherokee Holiday Inn.

Scam Jam on September 13, 2007 at the Macon County Community Services Building. This event is in conjunction with the AARP.