

# **PARTNERS FOR SMART GROWTH**

## **ANNUAL REPORT OF ACTIVITIES**

**JULY 2014 thru JUNE 2015**

### **Partners 2015 Membership**

Some of our Partner membership faces changed during the year however, our membership totals remained basically the same during 2015. New members included Gary Long, Amanda Mac, Randy Wynn and Missy Richardson. Our membership for the reporting year 2015 is sixty three individual members advocating Smart Growth for Butts County! A complete listing of members and member affiliated associations can be found on our website at [www.partnersforsmartgrowth.org](http://www.partnersforsmartgrowth.org).

### **Community Open Meetings**

Partners for Smart Growth believe it is important to provide opportunities for Butts County citizens to hear from leaders on topics or issues that affect our local economy, our needs and/or interest. These meetings are "Open" meetings that any interested citizen may attend. The following open meetings were planned & conducted by Partners, July 2014 thru June 2015:

#### August 2014 "Tourism's Economic Impact on Butts County"

**Tourist:** *one that makes a tour for pleasure or culture.*

**Tourism:** *the practice of traveling for recreation; the guidance or management of tourist; the promotion or encouragement of touring; the accommodation of tourist.*

For hundreds of years, our community has been impacted by tourism. Our community has been a crossroad of Native American footpaths, stagecoach trails and now, modern highways. Three of our community's most unique resources annually attract thousands of tourists and have a tremendous impact on our local economy. Dauset Trails, Indian Springs State Park and the Village at Indian Springs presented facts and figures on the economic impact of their programs and facilities on Butts County's economy.

#### October 2014 Local Legislative Delegation and Agenda

The 2014 Day at the Capital was very successful in making the State Legislators aware of our community. In evaluating the 2014 event it was deemed important that we also develop and present a local legislative agenda for 2015. With that purpose in mind, our local State Legislators were invited to share anticipated statewide issues for 2015 and provide input on how Butts County might best present a local agenda to the Georgia General Assembly. Local governmental leaders and citizens were also invited to share their input and concerns.

#### February 2015 Consolidation of Local Governments

For several years there have been conversations regarding the consolidation of governments within Butts County. In that consolidation of governments is not a simple matter and may or may not be a smart choice for Butts County, Partners arranged an open community meeting on the topic for the purpose of learning more about consolidation of governments in Georgia. Mr. Harry Hayes of the UGA Carl Vinson Institute of Government presented information and answer questions regarding consolidation pros, cons and the process.

#### March 2015 Funding our Children's Future

The funding challenges continue as Butts County's BOE, like many across the State, face serious funding issues in balancing the school system budgets. Robert "Buddy" Costley was hired by our Board of Education as Superintendent in December of 2011. His leadership skills were immediately proven as he led the school system through a successful E-SPLOST ballot. Superintendent Costley provided facts and figures regarding the funding of our school system, federal, state and local dollars, and the role education special purpose local option sales taxes have played in funding our school system.

## **Smart Growth Issues Facing Butts County**

The mission of Partners for Smart Growth is to promote balanced and responsible growth in Butts County. Our goals include providing forums for discussion, advocating sustainable growth, promoting consensus on growth issues, long-range planning & adequate delivery of government services, a balanced tax base and enhanced quality of life to insure the economic vitality of our community. Partners have taken an active role in three growth issues facing Butts County. Previously identified issues included transportation (road/rail/air), economic development, planning and permitting. New or “re-newed” issues identified in for 2015 included blighted properties and litter control, countywide internet access, a fact finding review of consolidated governments and/or services and expanded tourism opportunities (conference center).

However, all of these needs and issues suddenly paled in comparison to the 300 pound gorilla that arose in December in the State House of Representatives. The need for funding improvements to Georgia’s roads and bridges resulted in proposed legislation which, if realized as initially written, would have had catastrophic impact on Butts County base of tax revenues.

### **House Bill 170 Outcomes:**

The focus of the Jackson/Butts County Legislative Day shifted to advocating an alternative method of funding transportation improvements. Unified efforts by our local legislative delegates, all local governments, authorities, businesses and civic groups including the Chamber and Partners resulted in two trips to the Capital, numerous personal contacts & e-mails to State Legislators. The outcome was an end result that preserved most of the motor fuel tax revenues that have become so vital to Butts County’s tax revenue base.

### **Transportation Outcomes:**

The Transportation Board reviewed many identified needs and potential projects for Butts County. Partners had direct involvement in two of these transportation issues. The Mulberry Street/Covington Street Connector Project, requested by the City of Jackson was supported and moves forward in a study and design phase. The Transportation Board also heard from State Coordinators regarding airport needs and made the recommendation to the Butts County Commissioners that an airport feasibility study be undertaken.

### **Economic Development & Planning Outcomes:**

#### ***City of Jackson Initiatives:***

Along with many other local organizations, Partners strongly supported two initiatives of the City of Jackson. One, the Clean-Up Task Force addressed both blighted properties and litter control. Partners participated in each of the City’s “Clean-Up Days” and was one of the first organizations to enroll in the “Adopt-A-Street” Litter Control Program. Partners also supported the Downtown Development Authority’s visioning process by participating in planned town hall meetings, open houses and surveys.

#### ***Regional Multi-Purpose Conference Center:***

The need for a conference center in our community was one of the identified needs at the founding of Partners in 2007. Through the leadership of Senator Burt Jones and with the pledged financial support of local citizens and organizations, such a regional, multi-purpose center is now in the design phase. The center is to be built by the State at Indian Springs State Park and will serve Butts and surrounding counties needs while also providing revenues for the State Park.

## **Partner Community Activities**

### Law Enforcement Appreciation Week

Partners joined in nationwide efforts to show recognition and appreciation of law enforcement personnel. A proclamation was presented declaring the week Feb. 9th as Law Enforcement Appreciation Week in Butts County. Banners were placed at two sites and “gift” baskets were delivered to both the Butts County Sherriff’s Office and the City of Jackson Police Department. Plans are to make this an annual recognition.

### 2015 Jackson/Butts County Legislative Day

The 2015 Legislative Day was co-coordinated by the Chamber and Partners. Seventy three citizens made the trip meeting and lobbying with legislators regarding HB 170. Gift bags were again provided for all legislators. Special thanks to Fresh Air BBQ (sandwich coupons & sauce), Central Georgia EMC (energy efficient light bulb), Georgia Power (Jackson Lake Key Chain), The Village at Indian Springs (jellies) and the Butts County Historical Society (tourism brochures). Again this year, the support and efforts of the Butts County legislators, Susan Holmes, Andy Welch and Burt Jones was tremendous!

### Annual Celebrity Roast

Funding for Partner’s activities comes from two sources, membership and fundraising. The Annual Celebrity Roast has been the only Partners fundraising event and has also served as a much anticipated form of community entertainment. In May 2015, long serving local judge, Byron Smith was “roasted” by Larry Fletcher, Tommy Glidewell, Peter Banks, Byrd Garland and Bill Fears. The fun-filled evening of entertainment began with the music of Zach Berry. Recipients of the Partners 2015 Academic Scholarships were also recognized at the event. The event generated over \$6,500 to support Partner’s community activities.

### Partners Academic Scholarships

Partners began awarding academic scholarships to Butts County graduating seniors in 2008. The scholarships are viewed as one way in which Partners can demonstrate its belief in the importance of education and our support for the local education system. The scholarship program began with the funding of one \$500 scholarship. In 2012, the funding amount was raised to \$1,000. In 2015, Partners awarded \$1,000 scholarships to JHS graduates Carolyn Harkness who is attending LaGrange College and to Robert Reeves who will be attending Gordon State University.

### Financial Support & Involvement

Over the past twelve months, Partners has donated over \$5,300 to support the following activities and/or organizations:

- Boy Scouts of America
- Butts County 4-H
- Butts County Historical Society
- Butts County Parks & Recreational Programs for Youth
- Butts County Chamber of Commerce:

Jackson Alive Festival, Christmas Parade & Halloween on 2sn Street  
 Butts County Schools: Teacher Recognition & BOE Community Conversations Seminar  
 Butts County Library Summer Reading Program  
 United Way (Senior Citizen Activities)

## **Partner Marketing, Organizational & Communications Accomplishments**

### **Website:**

Partners designed and launched a new website in Jan. 2013. The website provides opportunities to inform citizens of our organization, its mission, goals and to promote Partner activities and initiatives. Since its inception, the website has recorded over 28,000 site visits.

### **Facebook:**

Facebook posting continue to be an effective means to announce and promote Partner activities and initiatives. Promotional efforts to increase followers of our page have proven successful. Since July of last year, the number of likes to our page have increased by 90%.

### **Partner Updates:**

Monthly “*Updates*” were e-mailed to all Partner members during the year. These updates are designed to keep all Partners aware, informed and engaged in the organizations activities and initiatives.

### **Standing Committees:**

Partner Standing Committees played a strong role in providing content and leadership for the Partners 2015 Plan of Action. The Standing Committees not only add structure to our plan of action but also provided more opportunities for all Partner members to be involved and contributors to *Smart Growth* in Butts County.

#### 2015 Standing Committees:

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Chairperson</b>	<b>Members</b>
Finance	Bob Ryan	Zack Sowell
Membership	Zack Sowell	Missy Richardson & Al Jordan
Programs & Roast	Ed Whitehouse	Jerry Carter, Bill Jones, Bob Ryan Kim Freshwater, Al Jordan, Luke Weaver
Scholarship	Loy Hutcheson	Betty Carter & Carol Weaver
Nominating	Jerry Carter	Beverly Stewart & Larry Morgan
Public Meetings	Ray Bitrick	Jim Herbert
Conference Center	Burt Jones	Luke Weaver, John Rainwater, Byrd Garland
Day at the Capitol	Joe Westbury & Jerry Carter	John Rainwater, Jim Herbert
Public Relations	Joe Westbury & Jerry Carter	Jesse Hodges