

# COGNIZANCE

## The Official Newsletter of the Lower Savannah Council of Governments

### Building a Brighter Future Through Cooperation

Aiken | Allendale | Bamberg | Barnwell | Calhoun | Orangeburg

## Update From Our Executive Director

Welcome to the Spring 2024 edition of the Lower Savannah Council of Governments newsletter,

I hope that everyone's new year has started off on the right foot. Council staff enjoyed the holiday break and have been back moving full steam ahead on various projects to benefit individuals, businesses, and local governments in the region.

A few of the programs and projects I want to highlight include nine South Carolina Infrastructure Improvement Program (SCIIP) grants, American Rescue Plan (ARP) special projects for qualifying seniors, the "Others Raising Children" program and the upcoming Youth Job Fairs being conducted in Aiken and Orangeburg Counties.

The Lower Savannah COG assisted fifteen communities to apply for SCIIP funding through the Rural Infrastructure Authority (RIA). The Authority funded even more projects in our region and Council staff is administering water and wastewater projects in the following municipalities: Town of Allendale, Town of Blackville, Town of Burnetown, City of Denmark, Elloree Water System, New Ellenton Commission of Public Works, Town of St. Matthews, Town of Wagener, and the Town of Williston.

The COG's Human Service Division was allocated ARP funds, from the SC Department of Aging (SC DOA), for special services for qualifying seniors. Council staff are working with individuals and providers in the region to supply exterminator, dental and lawn services, as well as hearing aids to qualifying seniors. This special funded program ends this summer. In addition, the Council receives a small amount of funds for "Others raising Grandchildren." The funds provide qualifying guardians limited financial assistance for clothing and accessories prior to the new school year and during the winter holidays. This past December the Council assisted nineteen (19) guardians and thirty-three (33) children.

Finally, as we approach the end of the school year, the COG's Workforce Development Division will conduct two Youth Job Fairs - Aiken (April 23<sup>rd</sup>) and Orangeburg (April 25<sup>th</sup>). They also are gearing up for their Jump-Start program where they work with school districts and employers in the region to find qualified "rising seniors" summer employment.

These are just a few of the many programs provided by the Lower Savannah Council of Governments. Please visit our website [www.lscog.org](http://www.lscog.org) for more information.

Best wishes,  
Bill

## Upcoming Committee Events

Visit [www.lscog.org/events](http://www.lscog.org/events) for details.

- May 9** | WDB Youth Committee Meeting
- May 9** | **Executive Committee Meeting**
- May 14** | Thoroughbred Country Advisory Committee Meeting
- May 15** | Home TRC
- May 16** | Lower Savannah RAAC
- May 27** | **Memorial Day – Closed**
- May 28** | Disability Committee
- June 4** | Workforce Development Board
- June 13** | **Board of Directors Meeting-Orangeburg**

## Human Services

Every October is Residents' Rights Month and in 2023 the Lower Savannah Long Term Care Ombudsman Program chose to celebrate it in a big way. Each resident in our region had the opportunity to submit a creative response to the question, "How do you amplify your voice," for a chance for the resident and their facility to win a prize. The LSCOG staff had a great time voting and was able to pick one winner from an assisted living facility and a skilled nursing facility. Mr. Billy Keen won from Aiken Rehabilitation and Care with his painting of a sailboat and Ms. Linda Ely won from Hammond Square for her creative depiction of a Christmas tree. Mr. Keen and Ms. Ely each received a gift card for their hard work. Alanna Berrie and Charlotte McNeely, Lower Savannah Long Term Care Ombudsman, had the privilege of presenting Mr. Keen and Ms. Ely with their prize. The excitement of the wins is felt by all the residents in each facility. The resident's excitement continues as they wait to see what their facility will receive to help enhance their activity programs.



Left to Right: Linda Ely (Resident) and Charlotte McNeely (LTCO)



Left to Right: Alanna Berrie (RLTCO), Billy Keen (Resident), Amanda Washington (Activities Director)



## Staff Retreat

LSCOG staff participated in a fun-filled retreat on December 19, 2023. Activities included building a Gingerbread House a la the Great British Baking Show model with time constraints and “ingredients” provided out of cardboard, stickers, glitter, “snow”, and markers. On this sunny, brisk day, staff then proceeded to South on Whiskey for a friendly mini-golf tournament, and gift exchanges.



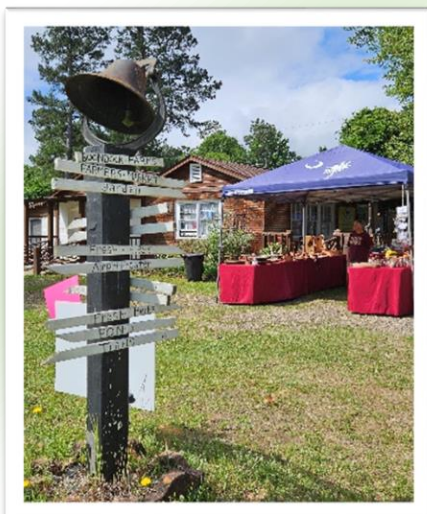
Lower Savannah COG staff pictured making Gingerbread houses.



Staff participating in a game of mini-golf.

## Tourism

The South Carolina Ag + Art Tour is a free, self-guided tour of farms and markets featuring local artisans at every stop. During the tour visitors have the opportunity to see first-hand where their food comes from, watch artists in action and purchase their works, enjoy the melodies of local musicians, and learn more about rural life. The tour is the largest free farm and art tour in the nation with over 85,000 visitors participating since 2012.



Pictured:  
Boondock  
Farms  
during 2023  
Ag + Art  
Tour.



### AG + Art Tour 2024 Schedule

- May 11 – Aiken County
- May 18-19 – Bamberg County
- June 1-2 – Allendale County
- June 8-9 – Barnwell County

## 59th Annual South Carolina Governor's Conference On Tourism & Travel

Thoroughbred Country staff attended the 59th annual South Carolina Governor's Conference on Tourism & Travel in Hilton Head Island, February 12-14, 2024. More than 350 tourism industry leaders from across the state gathered for the tourism conference which provided opportunities for knowledge sharing, networking, and celebrating industry accomplishments. To open the conference, Duane Parrish, Director of the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism (SCPRT), previewed Discover South Carolina's 2024 tourism marketing strategies and highlighted the impact the industry has on the state.

"Because of the hard work, dedication, innovation, and care that our industry professionals put in day in and day out, South Carolina's hospitality and tourism industry continues to grow," said Director Parrish. "As our industry grows and invests in our big cities and small towns, our quality of life improves, and the visitors we attract pump dollars into local economies and fuel countless businesses."

South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster was in attendance to celebrate the success of the tourism industry. "Tourism is a major industry for us, and the future looks great," said Gov. McMaster. "We are in paradise. We have so much in terms of natural beauty, history, and climate. This is the perfect place for a vacation. There is no place like it on Earth, and I want to thank you for recognizing that and sharing it with the world."

The three-day conference included a slate of leading experts presenting on top trends and topics impacting the industry, from AI to Anthony Melchiorri, host and co-executive producer of Travel Channel's Hotel Impossible.



**Governor Henry McMaster pictured giving a speech at the event.**



# Planning, Community and Economic Development (PCED)

The Planning, Community, and Economic Development (PCED) division hosted a workshop at Barnwell State Park on February 21, 2024. The workshop was well attended with 30 participants from around the region that included mayors, councilmembers, and staff.

Dr. Jennifer Clyburn Reed, Federal Co-Chair of the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC), and one of the featured speakers, gave an interactive presentation on the goals of the SCRC. As part of the discussion and dialogue with the workshop participants, Dr. Reed created an opportunity for participants to share concerns and needs in each of their communities. Housing, healthcare and improved infrastructure were among the top issues noted. The SCRC was federally funded a little over two years ago and covers seven states and 400 plus counties. All of the LSCOG counties fall within the boundaries of the SCRC and are eligible for grant funding.

Ashely Kellahan, Field Services Manager with the Municipal Association of South Carolina, was another featured speaker and gave a very informative presentation on the Basics of Effective Public Meetings. Ms. Kellahan was able to give several specific scenarios of issues that councils and public appointed advisory groups are dealing with across the state. The scenarios and questions led to a lot of great discussion among the workshop participants.



Workshop event at the Barnwell State Park

Closing out the workshop, the PCED staff each shared how services can help towns, cities, and counties in all facets of planning, transportation, housing, grants, and community development. The PCED staff serves to help develop projects of all types, to leverage funds, and seek grant funding to make projects possible. All towns, cities, and counties are encouraged to talk with the PCED staff for project success.



One of the attendees speaking at the event.

# Workforce Development and SC Works Center

## Lower Savannah Workforce Development Area (LSWDA) Hire Summit

We are excited to announce the upcoming Hire Summit events to be held in April 2024 to connect the LSWDA's high school juniors and seniors to employers and employment opportunities. Additionally, students from CTE (Career and Technical Education) programs in marketing and digital arts will have the opportunity to showcase their career readiness by providing their designs and plans to advertise and market the event. The event aims to bridge the gap between education and industry, providing a platform for students to demonstrate their skills and for employers to connect with the regions emerging talent.

### Preparation for Success:

- CTE students are actively involved in creating the marketing plan and promotions for the event, highlighting their creativity and expertise.
- School districts are diligently preparing students for the event, with counselors and career specialists guiding students on proper job fair etiquette, attire, resume building, and interview skills.

### Collaborative Efforts:

- Employers have been invited through a joint effort involving school districts, Lower Savannah Business Services, economic development agencies, and chambers of commerce. This collaboration ensures a diverse range of opportunities for both students and employers.
- CTE industry-recognized certifications will be prominently featured on the registration invites, showcasing the valuable skills of our future workforce to prospective employers.

We invite you to join us at the Hire Summit, where talent meets opportunity. Together, let's shape the future of our workforce.

### Mobile Unit Schedule April 2024

**April 23 – Hire Summit, Aiken Highschool, Aiken SC, 9 am to 1:30 pm**

**April 24- Aiken Adult ED, 2432 Jefferson Davis Hwy, 9 am to 1 pm**

**April 25 – Hire Summit, Orangeburg City Gym, Orangeburg SC, 9 am to 1:30 pm**



Workforce Mobile Unit

# Administration



## 2023 ANNUAL BANQUET

The Lower Savannah Council of Governments honored the following for dedicated years of service. Nora Sanders, 35 years; Frances Owens, 30 years; Mary Ann Keisler, 25 years; Alanna Berrie, 5 years; and Emory Langston, 5 years. Recognition of Board Members for years of service were David Kenner 20 years and James Haigler for 30 years. We appreciate your dedication!

## INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Our internship program after a hiatus from COVID, has resumed. We have three students from USC Aiken participating in the program, Katelyn Danner, Zach Matthews, and Will Hutto. The internship program is designed to enhance students' skills and prepare them for the workplace. In addition, the program gives students the opportunity for career exploration, development, and to learn new sets of skills.

## CONDOLENCES

Our condolences to the family of Thomas Hayden "Tommy" Williams. Mr. Williams was on the Lower Savannah Council of Governments board for 18 years. Mr. Williams dedicated 41 years of service to the Town of Perry in various ways including serving as Mayor.



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